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EARLY OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES.

THIRTY-SIX LESSONS

BY

W. H. LYON.

TWENTY-FIFTH EDITION.

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Story of Israel. Three grades: Primary (Rev. ALBERT WALKLEY), Intermediate (Rev. EDWARD A. HORTON), and Advanced (Rev. W. HANSON PULSFORD).

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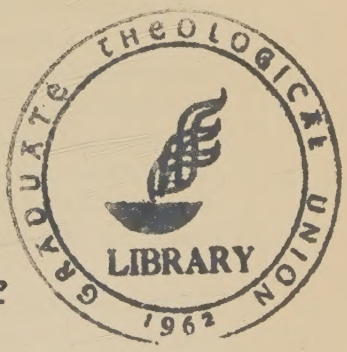

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PREFACE.

In these Lessons, four aims have been constantly kept in view:—

1. To *freshen* the Biblical story by new, though, of course, not better language, since familiarity with the common text seems to dull appreciation.

2. To *elucidate* the story by expressing obscure or difficult passages in clearer language and, by incorporating the results of modern scholarship in the narrative, to explain many allusions to ancient places and customs.

3. To *modernize* the story by showing that its personages were real men and women of like parts and passions with ourselves.

4. To make the story *helpful* to the conscience by leading the reader to exercise his frank moral judgment on all that is done instead of, as is too often the case, confusing it by extenuating what is plainly wrong.

Almost no use is made of the "higher criticism," which belongs rather to the Advanced Course. The story is usually told as it stands, except where its inconsistency is such as to be evident to the young reader.

In the selection of stories these Lessons have been limited by the plan to the list contained in the Primary Lessons, which had been printed before these were begun; but they have been often extended so as to take in passages before and after, and to make Lessons better suited to the age for which they were intended.

W. H. L.

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CONTENTS.

Lesson	I.	The Story of the Creation.
	II.	Cain and Abel.
	III.	The Great Flood.
	IV.	The Tower of Babel.
	V.	The Story of Abraham.—Part I.
	VI.	The Story of Abraham.—Part II.
	VII.	The Story of Abraham.—Part III.
	VIII.	Isaac and Rebekah.
	IX.	Jacob and Esau.
	X.	Jacob and Rachel.
	XI.	The Meeting of Jacob and Esau.
	XII.	The Story of Joseph.
	XIII.	Joseph in Egypt.
	XIV.	Moses' Childhood.
	XV.	Moses and Pharaoh.
	XVI.	Moses crossing the Red Sea.
	XVII.	Moses and the Ten Commandments.
	XVIII.	The Promised Land.
	XIX.	Balaam and the Ass.
	XX.	Joshua at Jericho.
	XXI.	Gideon and the Angel.
	XXII.	Gideon's Band.
	XXIII.	The Story of Samson.
	XXIV.	Ruth.
	XXV.	Samuel.
	XXVI.	The Anointing of Saul.
	XXVII.	David: His Youth.
	XXVIII.	David, and Saul's Hatred of Him
	XXIX.	David, the King.
	XXX.	David and Absalom.
	XXXI.	The Crowning of Solomon.
	XXXII.	Solomon's Judgment.
	XXXIII.	Elijah fed by Ravens.
	XXXIV.	Elijah and the Priests of Baal.
	XXXV.	Elijah and the Chariot of Fire.
	XXXVI.	Elisha.

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LESSON I.

THE STORY OF THE CREATION.

(Genesis, chapters i., ii., iii.)

LESSON TEXT.— "The invisible things of God . . . are clearly seen . . . through the things that are made."— ROM. i. 20.

I. THE AUTHOR.

The Books.— The first five books of the Old Testament are often called the *Pentateuch.* Some add the sixth book, Joshua, and call this whole the *Hexateuch.* It was once believed that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and in the common version of our Bible Genesis is called the "First Book of Moses," Exodus the "Second," etc. But these titles, like the headings to the chapters, do not belong to the originals, but were added later. It is now commonly believed that these books, though containing some things said by Moses, were put into their present form centuries after he died. Indeed, none of the books make any claim to having been written by Moses. They mention no author at all. They do not claim any divine inspiration or to be anything else than what they seem to be as you read them,— the simple story of things as they appeared to the unknown writer or writers.

Compiled.— It is commonly believed that the Hexateuch is a compilation; that is, it is made up from several stories or accounts pieced together, but when or by whom written or even put together, is not very certainly known. In several cases where two different accounts were found, they were placed one after the other. One of these cases is this very story of the creation. There are really two stories, as we shall now see.

II. THE STORIES.

First.— The first one takes up the whole of the first chapter and the second chapter to the middle of the fourth verse. It tells how everything was created in six days,— light on the first, the "firmament" or dome of the sky, dividing the waters of heaven from those of the earth, on the second, the separation of land and sea, and the making of grass and bushes and trees, on the third, the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth, the fishes and the birds on the fifth, the animals and man on the sixth. Then, on the seventh day, God rested.

Second.— The second story of the creation runs from verse fourth to the end of chapter second. The style is very different: the Deity is called "Lord God" instead of "God," a difference which we shall often notice, and the order of creation is different. First came man (v. 7), then vegetation (v. 9), then the animals (v. 19), then woman (v. 21), not out of the dust but from a rib of the man.

Comparison.— If we compare the first account of the creation, which seems the more systematic and less poetic of the two, with what is known *now,* we find some errors. But if we compare it

with what was generally known *then*, we shall find that it is remarkably accurate. It is more so, and is much nobler and more dignified, than the account given in other ancient religions. We ought to be proud that our religious ancestors were so wise and so high-minded.

This second writer adds an account of how death, pain, labor, thorns and thistles, the hostility of man and beast, and other strange things came into this world which the good God had made. It is a very picturesque and interesting story. He does not pretend to speak with any authority, but simply gives what he thinks must have been the way that so much trouble came into human life. It was all caused, he says, by human sin. If man had obeyed what God told him, he would have been happy.

Origin of Evil.— In casting about for the beginning of the trouble, he fixed upon an animal which everybody hates, the strange, slinking, knowing snake. He was once a beautiful animal, walking on legs. He persuaded the woman that there would be no harm in eating the forbidden fruit; in fact she would know a great deal more, which was what God was afraid of. She tasted the fruit, found it good, and persuaded her husband to try it, too. Then the two, who had been as innocent as children before, knew the great difference between right and wrong, and were ashamed of having disobeyed the good God. As a punishment, the serpent was degraded to crawl as he does now, Adam and Eve, instead of living happily in the beautiful garden, were sent out into the world to earn their living by hard work, and pain and sorrow came upon human life from that day till this.

III. Topics and Questions.

Ought we to expect ideas of the creation to be as correct 2,500 years ago as now? Is it not strange that this old account is so close to what we now know to be true? Does the story anywhere pretend to be told on divine authority? If God had told men exactly about these things, could they have understood? Did they *need* to be told exactly? What is your idea of divine inspiration? Is there any *now?*

As to the "firmament," see Gen. vii. 11. How were the ocean and the dry land separated? In v. 14 "signs" refers to the old "astrology." What do you think is meant by man being made "in the image of God"? Has it anything to do with idols being made in the image of men? What does Jesus say about God's resting? (John v. 17). Look in the Revised Version for chapter two, vs. 4, 5. In what sense are we made "of the dust of the ground"? No one knows just where the Garden of Eden was supposed to be, but it must have been somewhere between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Do you think it was right in God to put the forbidden fruit where man could get at it so easily? Why should man have *any* temptations? In v. 18 notice that "help meet" are two words.

In chapter three, notice that Satan is not referred to, and that the "fruit" is *not* said to be an apple. Why should it be said that the woman sinned first? Do you think the man seems any better than the woman in this story? What do you think of the idea of God in v. 8?

The story of Adam and Eve is the story of every man and woman. We all begin in a state of innocence and without care or responsibility. Childhood is Eden. Then come temptation, the opening of the eyes to evil, the fall into sin, the necessity of labor, the beginning of anxiety and sorrow. But Jesus has taught us that God still loves us, even when we are out of Eden, and tries to bring us back to himself; and that all sorrow and pain and labor rightly taken fit us for the life hereafter.

Note.—For other stories of creation see Clodd's "Childhood of Religions," and James Freeman Clarke's "Ten Great Religions." For the Bible story retold, see Milton's "Paradise Lost."

LESSON II.

CAIN AND ABEL.

(Genesis, chapter iv. 1–15.)

Lesson Text.—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—Gal. vi. 7.

I. The Connection.

The story of Eden is the old Hebrew answer to the question of how labor and pain and death came into the world which God had pronounced "good." They came, it says, from the sin of the first woman, into which she led the first man. Now the results of that sin begin to show themselves in the children also. The first jealousy, the first quarrel, the first murder, are now to be described.

II. The Two Sons.

Adam and Eve had two sons. The elder was named Cain, and he became, when he grew up, a farmer. The younger was named Abel, and he became what we should call a stock-raiser, a breeder of sheep and probably of goats also.

III. The First Sacrifice.

Sacrifice in the old religions is a sign either of thankfulness or of fear, probably generally of fear. When the crops grew well or the herds were large and healthy, the owner of them selected some of the best grain or fruits or animals, and burnt them upon an altar, either out of gratitude to God for his goodness or to beg him to continue good, and not send, as he sometimes did, hail or drought or pestilence. It was very much like paying taxes. When the offering was burned, the smoke and odors which rose on high were supposed to be going to God, or the flames which ate up the offering were supposed to be God consuming it. (See viii. 21.) So Cain and Abel each paid his tax, that is, made his offering out of what he had.

IV. The Jealousy.

But it seemed to Cain that the Lord accepted Abel's offering and not his. How did he know? The ancients, as we remember also in Roman and Greek history, attached great importance to what we should call mere accidents. If it thundered on the left hand of the army, or if one stumbled going into a house, or if the entrails of the animal sacrificed were malformed or otherwise peculiar, or if the fire did not burn well, and so on, they feared that the gods were angry. Probably something went wrong with Cain's offering. Perhaps the fire did not burn well or went out (and this was more serious then than it would be now). Then Cain was jealous. Jealousy is always unreasonable. It exaggerates, lays the blame somehow upon the one who is fortunate, and hates him.

V. The Consequences.

The Lord, says the story, warned Cain of what might come of this fierce brooding over his fancied wrongs. The trouble was

with himself. If he did well, he would find favor. But if he did not, his sin would master him, though he ought to rule over it. But Cain was in the power of his jealousy. He picked a quarrel with his brother, and, being older and stronger, killed him.

VI. The Penalty.

When the Lord asks for Abel, Cain answers in a sullen and surly way, "How should I know? I am not his keeper." But the Lord banished him from his presence, and cursed the ground so that it should never yield anything for him again. He should be a wanderer till he died. No one should kill him, for a mark was set upon him by which all should know who he was. It was the ancient idea, even among the Hebrews, that different parts of the earth were ruled by different gods, as they were by different kings. The Lord was only one of these gods, and when it is said (v. 16) that "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord," it is meant that he left that part of the world (perhaps Eden, *in* which the "garden" was) over which the Lord had power. We shall find this idea often in the earlier history of the Hebrews (Ruth i. 16).

VII. The Descendants of Cain.

The rest of the chapter tells of what Cain's posterity did. Cain himself built the first city, and his descendants invented tents, musical instruments, and metallic tools and weapons. This seems to imply that civilization is the result of sinful ambitions and passions, and that only the quiet country life was good for man. So a poet has said, "God made the country, and man made the town." This is exactly in line with the idea in the third chapter, that God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of *knowledge*. In the fifth chapter the story of the human race is carried on through Seth, the son of Adam, who took Abel's place in his parents' affection. The line of Cain is left to its fate unnoticed.

VIII. Cain's City.

The question is often asked, Where did Cain find a wife and inhabitants for his city, if he and his parents were the only human beings? The answer may be that some other story is here interwoven with the story that implies only one original pair, or it may be that the story is dealing with tribes under the names of individuals. This is often done in Genesis.

Topics and Questions.

The connection between this story and the last. The difference between the two sons. Does dealing with animals, cattle and horses for instance, tend to make men coarse and brutal? The various kinds of sacrifices, human sacrifices especially. What do they mean? What connection is claimed between them and the death of Jesus? What superstitious ideas yet remain among us? (Friday, thirteen, etc.) How did God speak to Cain? Does he still speak to men so? What do we mean by "brooding" over anything? What is the consequence? Is jealousy foolish as well as wicked? What are the penalties for murder now? Are they all just? What did Jesus say of anger? (Matt. v. 22). How does our idea of God differ from that so far in Genesis?

Is civilization or progress good for mankind? Do new temptations come with progress? What then? Is God any more in the country than in the city? Are men better now than in former times?

References.

"Bible for Learners" (or for Young People), ch. iv.; Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," ch. xii.; S. Baring-Gould's "Legends of Patriarchs and Prophets," ch. vi.

LESSON III.

THE GREAT FLOOD.

(Genesis, chapters vi., vii., viii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease."—GENESIS viii. 22.

I. THE STORY.

The Wickedness of Men.—"The sons of God" and "the daughters of men" probably mean the worshippers of God or the race of Seth and Enos (iv. 26), and the women of the race of Cain. Out of the union of these two came "mighty men," or a reckless and bloody race which grew rapidly worse. God began to be sorry that he had ever made human beings. His Spirit would gradually depart from them, good impulses and affections would die out, and in a hundred and twenty years (iv. 3) his patience would be exhausted, and his wrath would burst out. He would destroy not only man, but beast, bird, and creeping things.

Noah.—But he would spare Noah and his family, for Noah was an exception to the corruption of mankind. He told him to make an ark, or huge three-storied boat, 525 feet long, 87½ wide, 52½ high (a cubit is about 21 inches), and to go into it with his sons and their wives. He was to take with him, also, two of each kind of beast, bird, and creeping thing, or, as the other account says, seven of each kind of clean beasts, and two of each kind of the unclean. So Noah did, being then six hundred years old, and the Lord shut the door upon him.

The Deluge.—Then came the flood. For forty days and forty nights the rain fell till even the mountains were covered. The waters under the earth broke through and swelled the mass. Every living thing except those in the ark was drowned. One hundred and fifty days the water remained, then it began to subside till the ark grounded on one of the mountains of Ararat or Armenia. Forty days later Noah opened the window of the ark, and sent out a raven, which flew back and forth over the water, but did not return. Then he sent out a dove which soon came back. Seven days after this he sent the dove out again in the evening; she came back with a fresh olive leaf in her bill. Then Noah knew that the water had gone down to the tops of the trees. After seven more days he sent the dove out again, and, as she did not come back, he knew that the flood had dried up. Then he took off the top of the ark, and saw that it was safe for them all to go out; and, after over a year of confinement, the eight human beings and the long line of animals and birds came out to begin the world's life over again.

The Sacrifice and the Promise.—The first thing that Noah did was to build an altar and offer up sacrifices to God in gratitude for the preservation of his little family. And when the Lord smelled the fragrant odor of the roasting meat, he promised never again to curse the ground for human sin, or bring any more of

such calamity upon mankind. What was the use? Man was born sinful and could not help it.

The First Rainbow.— Then was seen a beautiful sign of this promise, the first rainbow. Whenever the ancient Hebrew saw the bow arching over the clouds after a shower, he was reminded of the covenant of God never to destroy the race again with a deluge. Then he thought both of man's sin and God's patience with him.

II. Topics.

1. *The Two Stories.*— The chapters on the Deluge show more clearly than any other that interweaving of two or perhaps more narratives which was mentioned in the first lesson. One story begins at vi. 5, and another at vi. 9, saying in the few following verses about the same thing in different words. The number of animals taken in is given differently in vi. 19, 20 and vii. 2, 3. The entrance into the ark is told twice, if not three times, *i.e.*, vii. 5, vii. 7, vii. 13. The whole story was evidently gathered from various sources.

2. *The Traditions of Other Nations.*— These are well summed up in Geikie's "Hours of the Bible," vol. i., ch. x. and xi. The Chaldeans, Hindoos, Persians, Greeks, Scandinavians, Mexicans, Indians, and others have legends of a similar flood. Do these relate to one deluge or to many? Why should there not have been many terrible overflows or rains in various localities in human history?

3. *Was the Deluge Universal?* The account certainly says that it was (vii. 19). But thoughtful men of all shades of religious opinion have latterly come to the conclusion that the Noachian Deluge was only local. The arguments for this conclusion are (1) The addition of such a vast mass of water to the weight of the earth—eight times that contained in the ocean beds—would have disarranged the solar system. (2) The vegetable world, trees, plants, grass, must have died, and even the fish, since the salt water would have become comparatively fresh, and the fresh would have been tainted. (3) The age of trees, and the signs of undisturbed places, as the light ashes on volcanoes, etc. (4) The distribution of plants and animals in various parts of the globe, separate species, for instance, in Australia. (5) The various species could not have been gathered in one place from all parts of the earth. (6) It would have been impossible to put pairs or sevens of all animals, with food for a year, into any such vessel. (7) There are no geological signs of, and abundant evidence against, a universal flood.

Yet there is no doubt that there have been local floods of tremendous extent and destructiveness, and these may well have given rise to the stories in so many nations. To *them* each flood *was* universal. It covered all the earth which they knew, and stories lose nothing in being passed from generation to generation.

III. Practical Lesson.

That great natural calamities, as floods, earthquakes, cyclones, etc., come to punish human sin, is no longer held by thoughtful men. There must be shown some connection of cause and effect between them. But they do train and develop human powers to ward them off, to prevent them, or to diminish their effects. Though we have not yet learned to make rain or hold back winds, it is hard to say what may not be done in future ages.

References.— Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," ch. x., xi.; Geo. Smith's "Chaldean Account of Genesis"; Encyclopædia Britannica, "Deluge"; "Bible for Learners," ch. vi

LESSON IV.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

(Genesis, chapters x. 1-12, xi. 1-10.)

LESSON TEXT. — "There cannot be Greek and Jew, . . . barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all and in all." — COLOSSIANS iii. 11.

I. THE STORY.

The Origin. — We have seen already that the ancients liked to reason backward, *i.e.*, instead of gathering facts and advancing upon them step by step to a conclusion, they fancied what *must have been* the explanation of whatever puzzled them. The garden of Eden, the serpent, etc., were set as the reason for human sin and suffering. Now comes another question, What is the reason for the difference of language? It seems like a misfortune. It divides nations from each other, makes communication difficult, and leads to hostile interests and war. Like all other misfortunes, this must have come from human sin. What was the sin?

The Growth of Mankind. — After the story of the saving of Noah and his family, we have in chapter ten a fragment of tradition which tells how that little group of people multiplied and spread out over the earth. This was far back in the dawn of history, and we can see only dim forms, as we do in the early morning when the darkness is not all gone. Little or nothing is said about the men or the tribes which are mentioned, until we come to verse six.

Nimrod. — Here we see a great man coming forward out of the darkness. First he is a mighty hunter. He grapples with the fierce beasts that then roamed over the thinly populated earth, the lion, the tiger, the wild boar. But he was "Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord" (v. 9). He was put into a proverb, because men felt that God was using his great powers for a great purpose. He won the admiration and favor of his fellow-men by his bravery and strength, and became a great chief. He led his followers down between the two great rivers Euphrates and Tigris, and there founded the kingdom of "Babel" (v. 10), or Babylon. This is the first point at which the sacred history of the Bible comes into contact with the history which we learn from other sources.

Babylon grew to be an immense city, but it is now only a few piles of bricks. Many of these bricks or flat tablets were used as records, and some of them have been found and read, giving us a great deal of curious and valuable history. Most of these early stories in Genesis have been found upon them, dating far back before Genesis was written. The Babylonians in later days, about 600 B.C., conquered Palestine and carried off the inhabitants captive. Hence the Old Testament commonly speaks of Babylon with enmity.

The Ruined Tower. — There were in a suburb of this mighty city the remains of a tremendous tower. The plan was evidently so grand, and the ruins had lain untouched for so many centuries,

that the popular imagination began to weave a story about it, like the ivy that climbs over old ruins. Men grew so proud, it was said, that they made up their minds to mount into heaven. They began with an enormous foundation, and were getting on so fast that the Lord came down to see about it. He saw that they must be stopped or they would do all that they imagined. So he hit upon the plan of making them speak different languages so that they could not understand each other. This succeeded so well that not only did they stop building the tower, but scattered in groups according to their language, all over the face of the earth. These groups grew into nations, and this is the reason why there are so many different nations each with its own speech. Perhaps one reason why this story atttached itself to this particular tower was that its name was Bab-El, or temple of the god El. The Hebrews thought that this came from their word *balal*, which means "to confound." They supposed that the temple was named from the confounding of tongues. Our language has adopted the word Babel to mean any confused sound of voices, as when we say that "the noises in the street made a perfect Babel."

Parallel Stories.— Homer tells us how "the two giants began to set Ossa on Olympus and Pelion on Ossa that they might climb to heaven. But the Son of Jove destroyed them." The Mexicans have a legend that the giants of Anahuac built a great hill at Cholula in order to climb to the clouds, but the gods hurled down fire and killed the workmen. The Mohammedans say that Nimrod built the tower.

II. Topics and Questions.

The discipline that comes in hunting,— strength, courage, quickness. How it prepares men to do good. The relation between the games of boys and what men have to do. Can boys and girls play "before the Lord"? Can business and trade be carried on "before the Lord"? Does the diversity of languages produce evil or good? How do you think that it arose? Where is the birthplace of the race supposed to have been? (Central Asia.) What great emigrations can you think of in history? What languages do the immigrants into this country speak? What is to be the result of their coming here? How ought we to treat immigrants? Read the account of Pentecost, Acts ii.

References.— Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," ch. xii; "Bible for Learners," ch. viii. and ix.; Baring-Gould's "Legends of Old Testament Characters," ch. xxiii. For an account of the Babylonian ruins and tablets, see Geo. Smith's "Chaldean Account of Genesis," ch. i., ii., iii.

LESSON V.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM.—PART I.

(Genesis, chapters xi. 27–32, xii. 1–5, xiii., xviii. 1–8, 16–33, xix. 1–27.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"—GENESIS xviii. 25.

I. THE STORY.

The Beginning of Hebrew History.— Thus far we have been studying the history of mankind as a whole. Now the author of Genesis begins to narrow this down to the history of one people. He begins with Shem, the eldest son of Noah, and follows down his descendants in a certain line till he comes to Terah. This man had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran, the father of Lot, died. Nahor, the father of Rebekah, remained in the old country. Abram emigrated, and became the ancestor of the Jews.

The First Hebrew.— (See xiv. 13.) The Jews were at first called Hebrews, from a word which means "to come over." A Hebrew, therefore, was an immigrant, one who had crossed the Euphrates, as our ancestors "came over" the Atlantic.

The Pilgrim.— Just as our forefathers crossed the ocean for religion's sake, so Abram crossed the great river and marched with his tribe southwest for the same reason. "Ur of the Chaldees," where he lived, was a region of great culture for those days, but its religion was an idolatrous worship of the sun, moon, and planets. But Abram felt that there was a higher being than these, one who made them. (See legend, Geikie, 259, Stanley, 19.) He felt within him an impulse, which seemed to him divine, to leave his home and people, and go where he could worship unhindered. So, with his nephew Lot, and their families and servants, he set out. Thus began the religious history which is told in the Old and New Testaments, the fruits of which we enjoy in a land of which Abram never heard. The new religion was, so far, only beginning, and had perhaps still some mixture of the old ways of thinking. But it had got as far as to believe in and to worship the invisible God, and that was a great advance over the idolatry in which Abram was born.

Lot.— Obeying God does not always bring worldly comfort at once. No sooner had Abram got into Canaan, as Palestine was then called, than he found famine (xii. 10) instead of the plenty which he had enjoyed in Ur. He had to go down farther, into Egypt. When the famine was over he came back to Canaan. But the two parts of the company (xiii.) could not agree. The herdsmen of Abram and Lot quarrelled. Abram gave Lot his choice of the land, and the young man took the fertile plain at the south of the Dead Sea, while Abram settled farther north, near the place where Hebron afterward stood.

The Argument of Abraham.— In chapter xviii. we have a beautiful, though in some parts a singular, legend. It says that one hot

day Abraham (for this change of name see xvii. 5) was sitting in his tent door, he saw all at once three men standing by him, who seem, as the story goes on, to have been the Lord and two angels. Abraham does not appear to be surprised at seeing them, but asks them to come in and have their feet washed (the sandals of those days covered only the soles of the feet, if anything at all was worn there); and we have a charming picture of the chief and his wife Sarah bustling about to get them a good dinner. The two angels go on after eating, but the Lord remains, and tells Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities which stood in the region where Lot had chosen to live, were to be destroyed for their wickedness. Now, Lot lived in Sodom, and Abraham began to plead with the Lord to spare it. It would be wrong to destroy the righteous with the wicked. If there were fifty good men there, would not the Lord be merciful? Yes. Then Abraham "beats down" the Lord to forty, thirty, twenty, ten. But not even ten can be found, and Sodom is doomed.

The Destruction of Sodom.— Meantime the two angels were on their way southward, and came to Sodom at evening. There they found Lot, and were welcomed to his house for the night. The inhabitants heard of it, and came in a mob to have these two strangers and probable enemies given up to them. Lot refused, and the angels smote the men with blindness. In the morning they warned Lot to flee. He, with his wife and daughters, started for the little hill-city of Zoar. They reached it at sunrise, and, looking back, saw fire and brimstone pouring down upon the two doomed cities. But they saw another terrible sight. Lot's wife had stopped and looked behind her, hesitating and longing for her old friends and neighbors, and she had been turned into a column of salt rock.

The Explanation.— It is easy to see, after the lessons we have had, how this story arose. At the bottom lies the old idea that all calamity is the punishment of sin. Here was a great catastrophe. Where was the sin? Some connection of Lot with the region laid the foundation of the story.

The facts are these: The region about the south of the Dead Sea was once volcanic. The soil is mixed with asphaltum (xiv. 10), which is combustible. Some volcanic eruption or stroke of lightning set the cities on fire. Near Sodom is a hill largely composed of salt rock. Many pieces have been broken off by the elements, and stand upright, some of them in the vague form of a human being. Josephus says that he saw the pillar of Lot's wife, and about 1200 a traveller claims also to have seen it.

II. Topics and Questions.

The reformers of the world: Abram, Moses, Paul, Luther, Wesley. What was Abram's religion? How did God speak to him? Does God speak to men now? What is a legend? What are angels? Does not the story make Abraham more merciful than God? Can God be argued with? Are not cities and nations destroyed by their sins? Was not Rome weakened by its corruption and conquered as a punishment?

References.— Stanley's "Lectures on the Jewish Church," Lecture i.; Geikie, ch. xii.–xvii.; "Bible for Learners," ch. x.–xiv.; Baring-Gould, pp 135–163.

LESSON VI.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM.—PART II.

(Genesis, chapter xxi. 1-21.)

LESSON TEXT.—"God heard the voice of the lad."—GENESIS xxi. 17.

I. THE STORY.

The Semitic Race.—The book of Genesis divides mankind into the descendants of the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The Japhetic races are (roughly speaking) those which inhabit India and most of Europe, the Hamitic are the negroes, and the Semitic are the Hebrews, Arabians, and Phœnicians. The story of Ishmael is the Hebrew way of accounting for the division between Hebrew and Arabian.

Sarah's Jealousy.—In ancient times polygamy was very common. It is allowed by the laws of Moses, but only in such a way as to curb the common practice which could not at once be done away. Sarah had one son, Isaac, and Hagar one, Ishmael. Ishmael was fourteen years old when Isaac was born, and he had been looked upon as Abraham's heir and his successor as chief. It was natural, perhaps, that his mother should have been a little triumphant over the childless Sarah, and perhaps that the boy should have been sometimes offensive to her, without meaning to be so, but simply as the involuntary reminder of her disappointment. But when Isaac was born, and became, as son of the lawful wife, the heir of Abraham, Sarah could not forbear from exercising her power. She moved Abraham to send the mother and child out into the desert, in hope that they would fall in with some passing caravan and so be taken forever from her sight.

God's Choice.—Abraham naturally shrank from this, but God told him to do so, for Isaac was to be the son through whom the chosen people should descend. So Abraham gave Hagar a bottle (that is, a skin) of water and some bread, and sent her out with her child. But the water was soon gone, and the dry desert stretched about her on every side. She put the boy under one of the low bushes, which give the only shade the desert affords, and went away a bow-shot and turned her back, so that she might not see him die. But God heard the boy cry, and showed Hagar a well near by. He promised to make of Ishmael a great nation. But he remained a man of the wilderness (not the desert, but the *wild* land, as distinguished from the cultivated fields or the towns) and became famous as an archer. "And," says the text, "God was with him."

The Ishmaelites.—Of the descendants of Ishmael, some, as the Bedouins, have remained in the desert. But the Arabs have been the makers, not only of a great religion, the Mohammedan, but of a great civilization, that of the Moors and Saracens, which, in the Middle Ages, was finer and higher than that of the Christians. But they have had no permanent and steady and lofty civilization.

The Chosen People.— The main point of these earlier chapters of Hebrew history is the promise, stated over and over again, that the race of Abraham shall be a peculiar and favorite people. As we shall see, God is represented as steadily setting apart one son, and putting aside others, with the deliberate purpose of making the descendants of one great, and of leaving those of the others in obscurity. Of the three sons of Terah, Abram is chosen and led out to begin a new race and religion. Of the two sons of Abram, Isaac is chosen and Ishmael sent away. Of Isaac's two sons, Jacob is blessed and Esau is passed over. So God is represented as creating a special and separate race to receive and set forth divine truth.

II. Topics and Questions.

The Mohammedan religion. The civilization of the Saracens and Moors. What part of the world is held by the Ishmaelites of to-day? What does the word Ishmaelite mean in a figurative sense? In what sense is "God with" the savages and barbarians? Does God take care of animals? of Africans? of Patagonians? How do you know? What traces do you see of God in history? In what sense do you think that the Hebrews were a "chosen people"? Is there any "chosen people" to-day?

III. Practical Lesson.

The chief thing to be noted in this lesson is the part which God takes in the casting out of the mother and child. When Abraham hesitates to do so barbarous an act, God takes the side of Sarah and orders it done; "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." This is what our fathers called election and predestination. We are all in God's hands, and his will is mightier than our own. It is not our doing that we are born in a civilized land instead of in Africa or the Arctic regions; and the influence of climate or education or circumstances is stronger sometimes than anything we can do. So there is not much room for pride or self-conceit. There is no "self-made" man, really. But we must be grateful for our birth in a free and civilized country, of good parents, and in pure and happy homes.

Yet our wills have something to do, enough to give us a *flavor* of goodness or wickedness. There was something wrong about Ishmael. Abraham cried, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee." God chooses good tools to work with.

References.— "Bible for Learners," ch. xv.; Stanley, Lecture ii.; Geikie, ch. xviii.

LESSON VII.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM.—PART III.

(Genesis, chapter xxii. 1-19.)

LESSON TEXT.—"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."—HOSEA vi. 6.

I. THE STORY.

The Only Son.— Isaac was the only son of Abraham. He had driven Ishmael out into the desert, and had lost all knowledge of him. Abraham was an old man. He loved Isaac with all his heart. He was not only the heir of his fortune, but he was to be his successor as chief of the tribe. If Isaac should die, the line of Abraham would be extinct, a fearful thing to think of in those days, even more than in these.

The Heir of the Promise.—But Isaac was more to Abraham than this. He believed that God had promised to make of him a great nation, the nation of the true religion, the chosen and specially guided nation of the world. The death of Isaac meant the failure of God's promise and the doom of mankind.

The Trial.— How astounded Abraham must have been when he heard God command him to slay his son with his own hand! Could God violate his own promise and spoil his own plan for mankind? There is no sign that Abraham understood why the command was given him. He obeyed without questioning.

The Obedience.— Early the very next morning Abraham made his preparations, even to splitting the wood for the altar, and, taking Isaac and two young men with him, set out for the place which God had mentioned, Mount Moriah, where the great temple at Jerusalem was afterward built. On the third day they arrived at the foot of the hill. The two young men were left with the ass, and poor Isaac was made to carry the wood with which he was to be burned. They were going "to worship," Abraham said. When Isaac asked where the lamb for the offering was, his father said that God would provide one. Not until the boy was bound and laid on the altar he had helped to build, did he know his fate.

The Rescue.— And now the knife was lifted with all genuineness of purpose. The blow was really going to fall. The trial had succeeded. The father's heart had been tested. The angel of the Lord called to him to stop and let the boy go, for God was satisfied that his heart was right. A noise in the thicket made Abraham look around, and there he saw a ram caught by the horns. Him they sacrificed, and a joyful father and son were they. Then the promise to make of Isaac a great nation was repeated with great emphasis, and the whole party went home to Beersheba.

The Explanation.— We have to translate these ancient stories into our modern way of stating such things. What we call the voice of conscience, the men of old more picturesquely called the voice of God. A clear conviction, a sudden, strong impulse was to them a command of Jehovah.

It is very clear whence came the trial of Abraham's faith. He had come from an idolatrous land, where human sacrifices were offered. He had settled among tribes who often practised the same dreadful rite. They sometimes showed their faith by burning or burying their first-born sons. Perhaps they taunted Abraham with his cold or feeble faith. Perhaps he was so impressed by their sacrifices and their noisy and gorgeous ceremonies till he began to believe that his religion *was* a pale and weak thing. Perhaps he wondered if his faith in *his* God was real and strong enough to stand offering up his only son. Perhaps he thought that if he did this he might win over some of his neighbors to his faith.

All of these thoughts combined to make him feel as if it were God's wish that he should do this, and he was deterred from it only by finding a ram among the bushes, as if God had sent it there. Whether this be true or not, we must honor Abraham for being true to what he *thought* was the divine command.

II. Topics and Questions.

The meaning of sacrifice among the ancients. What was offered? What nations can you think of who offered human beings? Do you know the story of Iphigenia? of Freeman, of Pocasset on Cape Cod, who killed his little girl a few years ago, so that God might bring her to life again? Do we offer sacrifices to-day? What? Do we offer human sacrifices? What does the mother who sends her boy to the war for his country's sake? In what sense was the death of Jesus a sacrifice?

III. Practical Lesson.

Abraham thought that he ought to do the same outward acts as his neighbors to show his religion. He confounded show with substance, and ritual acts with the deeds which make common life sweet and helpful. Are we not also liable to think those in other churches more acceptable to God merely because they do more outwardly striking things, more bowing or reading or responding in church, more singing and speaking and praying in the prayer-meeting? These things are good, but we must not forget that the quiet, simple well-doing of every day is what God likes, what makes the world better. Abraham served God far better by bringing up Isaac to be a good man than by slaying him on an altar.

References.—"Bible for Learners," ch. xvii. and xviii.; Stanley, Lecture ii., 51-56; Geikie, 357-363; Baring-Gould, 174-183.

LESSON VIII.

ISAAC AND REBEKAH.

(Genesis, chapters xxiii., xxiv.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."—MATT. xxv. 21.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Isaac was saved from the sacrifice, and Abraham rejoiced in the prospect of having his family continued. Like most fathers, he did not realize that his boy was getting to be a man and he himself was growing old. But, when his wife Sarah died, he began to think of his own end and what ought to be done for those who should live after him.

II. THE NEW TOMB.

First the dead must be cared for. Abraham was still a stranger in the land. The natives were "the children of Heth," or the Hittites, as we shall find them commonly called. One of them, Ephron, he met at the gate of the city, where business was usually done, and offered to buy from him the cave of Machpelah, which he owned. The sacred oaks of Mamre (xviii. 1) were there; and, just as our fathers liked to be buried near the church, and even in it, so Abraham wished his family tomb to be near or in a sacred place. The chivalrous Ephron at first would not take money for such a thing from a stranger. With true Oriental hospitality he offered to give it to Abraham. But Abraham, in his turn, was manly, and, having the money to pay for it, refused to take the cave as a gift, and finally paid four hundred shekels of silver for it, a silver shekel being worth about half a dollar. So Abraham bought the burial-place, which is shown still, and believed by many to hold the original tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah.

III. THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC.

Having buried his dear wife, Abraham made haste to see that his only son was suitably wedded. The twenty-fourth chapter contains a charming description of the marriage customs of the East, and almost every verse is a picture.

IV. THE FATHER'S CHOICE.

First you will notice how little the young man has to say or to do in the matter. All is arranged between the parents or relatives on both sides. This is still, to a large extent, the custom in Europe as well as in the East. Abraham, apparently without consulting Isaac, sends his oldest servant back to his native land, where the family of his brother Nahor still lived, to fetch from his kindred there a wife for his son. The Jewish repugnance to marrying out of the race is shown even as early as this. You know that even to-day a strict Jew will not marry one who is not a Jew.

V. The Servant's Success.

So we see the old servant, with a caravan of ten camels loaded with presents for the woman whom he should choose, travelling slowly over the country to Haran, the city of Nahor, in Mesopotamia. When he reached that place, he waited outside the gates by the well till the young women should come out to draw their evening supply of water. He offered a prayer that his choice might fall upon the right one. By and by out came a very beautiful young woman, who went down the steps to the well or spring, filled her pitcher, and came up again. There was something so charming about her that the old servant felt sure that she would make his master's son a good wife. He asked her for water, and the kind way in which she not only gave him, but his camels, also, to drink, attracted him still more. He gave her a golden nose-ring and two heavy gold bracelets, and asked her who she was. She answered that she was Nahor's grand-daughter. The old man bowed down, and thanked God that he had been so providentially guided.

VI. The Marriage Agreement.

Rebekah ran back into the city and told her family what had happened, and her brother Laban came out to meet the stranger. The old servant told him the story, and Laban and Bethuel, his father, gave Rebekah to him for Isaac. Then he brought out still more costly presents for her, and for her family, and after a few days she and her nurse and her slave-girls set out with him for her future home.

VII. The Marriage.

Meantime, the gentle Isaac, mourning still over his mother's death, wandered out in the cool of the eventide to meditate by himself. One evening, as he did so, he lifted up his eyes and saw the caravan coming back. Rebekah, finding from the servant who he was, veiled herself; for in the East the bride seldom shows her face till after she is married. The servant told Isaac what had occurred, and he consented to it. So Rebekah became his wife, and the lonely man was comforted.

VIII. Topics and Questions.

Try to picture to yourself what is described in this chapter. How does a camel look and walk? What is your idea of a caravan? Why are camels used in the East instead of horses? How do the men look, their complexion, beard, dress? The women? What can you recall of the marriage customs of the East? Compare them with ours. Why are the Jews so careful to marry among their own people? What has been the effect upon their character? Have there been many faithful slaves like the one in this chapter?

References.—"Bible for Learners," ch. xx.; Geikie, pp. 363-373; Baring-Gould, 187; Stanley, Lect. II. 31-42; Bible Dictionary, art. *Marriage.*

LESSON IX.

JACOB AND ESAU.

(Genesis xxv. 27–34, xxvii., xxvi. 34, xxviii. 1, 2.)

LESSON TEXT.—"He that loveth not his brother . . . cannot love God."—1 JOHN iv. 20.

I. THE TWINS.

The twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah were Jacob and Esau. They were not, as twins often are, alike in appearance or in character. They were very unlike. Esau was an outdoor boy, fond of roving and hunting, easy-going and careless. Jacob was a mild, peaceable boy, loving to live among the tents, fond of business, a little too fond of a bargain. The gentle Isaac loved the boy who was the more unlike him. There was a jolly, happy, breezy way about him that won the father's heart; and, besides, he liked the venison which the "cunning hunter" brought home to him.

II. THE BIRTHRIGHT.

Among the things which Jacob learned in his home life was good cooking. Especially did he know how to make a good soup, especially the kind still common in the East, of lentils (a kind of pea), onions, oil, rice, and spices. Esau usually ate what he could find. Coming in one day from his hunting, tired and hungry, he smelt the delicious pea-soup, and asked Jacob to give him some. Jacob saw his chance. In the Eastern tribes "the birthright"—that is, the leadership of the tribe and a double share of the property—descends to the eldest son. As the boys were twins, which was the eldest might be disputed. To settle the question, Jacob offered to buy the birthright with a dish of soup. "All right," said the reckless Esau: "what is the use of a birthright to me, if I am to die of starvation?" So the bargain was made, and the shrewd young Jacob became the first heir of the tribe. At the end of the next chapter we have another illustration of Esau's reckless ways. He married a native woman instead of one of his own nation. This grieved Isaac and Rebekah very much.

III. THE CONSPIRACY OF REBEKAH AND JACOB.

As Esau was his father's favorite, so Jacob was his mother's. She determined that Jacob should have the birthright confirmed to him by his father's blessing. This she did by a very sly trick.

Isaac was growing old, and his sight was very dim. One day he begged Esau to take his bow and arrows, and go out and kill him some venison, and he should have his father's blessing. Rebekah overheard this, and saw her chance. She told Jacob to run out and fetch two kids. Out of them she would make an imitation of venison, so that the old man should not know the difference. Then he should take it to his father, before Esau came back, and get the blessing first. Jacob objected that Esau was hairy,

and his father would feel the difference if he could not see it. But his mother promised to manage that for him, and he went out and brought in the kids. The meat she made into an imitation of venison, and the skins she put over his hands and around his neck.

Then he carried the meat to his blind father, and pretended to be Esau. "How did you get back so soon?" asked the old man "Oh, the good God brought the meat to me," answered the pious son. The poor father could not believe that it was Esau, for his voice was the voice of Jacob; but, when he felt the hairy hands and neck, he had to put his suspicions aside. He ate the meat, and gave the young man his blessing.

IV. Esau's Disappointment.

Isaac had hardly finished his blessing when Esau came in. When Isaac heard his voice, he "trembled very exceedingly" with foreboding of evil. "Who is this, then, that I have blessed?" he cried out. "I have given my blessing to some one. Whoever it is, the blessing must stand. I cannot take it back." Then Esau understood what had been done, and threw himself down at his father's feet with "a great and exceeding bitter cry," and begged for a blessing, too. "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" But Isaac had nothing left to give, and he could only prophesy the hard lot that Esau's race should have. They should live in the wilderness, away from the fatness of the earth, and be subject to Jacob's race, though the time should come when they should break off his yoke. Poor Esau could only bide his time till his father was dead, and then he would kill his treacherous brother. But Rebekah heard of his threat, and told Jacob to go away for a while to the old country, and stay with her brother Laban.

V. Topics and Questions

The two characters, the wild, uncontrolled Esau and the quiet, shrewd, persistent Jacob,—which do you like best? What do you mean by a "dissipated" man? What does *dissipate* mean? If a man yields to all the impulses that come to him, even though many of them be good, will he amount to much? Did Esau do right to sell his birthright? Was Jacob fair in his part of the bargain? What suggestions do you get from Jacob and this old story which has descended from him? What do you think of his piety? What is your opinion of Rebekah? Why could not Isaac take back his blessing? What do you know about the curses of witches, etc.? Might not Rebekah have seen that Jacob would be a more reliable leader of the tribe than Esau? Is it right to do evil that good may come?

References. — Stanley, Lect. N.; "Bible for Learners," ch. xxii.; Baring-Gould, xxvii.

LESSON X.

JACOB AND RACHEL.

(Genesis xxviii., xxix. 1–30, xxxv. 23–29.)

Lesson Text.—"This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." Gen. xxviii. 17.

I. Jacob's Search for a Wife.

Rebekah said to Isaac, her husband, that she was tired to death of the native women, one of whom Esau had married, and that she hoped that Jacob would never take one of them. Then Isaac called Jacob, gave him his blessing, and sent him up to the old country, Mesopotamia, to take one of the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother. This time the young man was allowed to choose for himself. The choice by the old servant of his father had not been very fortunate for poor Isaac. Esau, however, had by this time grown sullen and contrary, and, hearing his father charge Jacob not to marry any of the women of Canaan, went straight off, and took one of Ishmael's daughters, whom his father certainly would almost as much disapprove of.

II. The Sacred Stone.

As Jacob journeyed on towards Haran, thinking of his birthright and all that came with it, how he was to be the hero of the promise made to his father Abraham, night overtook him. He lay down upon the ground and put one of the loose stones, which abound in that region, under his head for a pillow. You know that the Japanese and Chinese sleep with blocks of wood under their heads. As often happens to us, the thoughts that were in his mind continued into his dreams. It seemed to him that there was a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and angels were going up and down upon it. And at the top of it stood the Lord, who told him that he should have the land on which he was sleeping, and that his race should spread on all sides and should be blessed. He himself would be with him wherever he should go, and bring him back in safety.

Now in those days men believed that the various gods lived only in certain places, like earthly kings. We believe that there is only one God, who is everywhere. Jacob believed that he had left *his* God, Jehovah, behind, when he left Beer-sheba. But here He was in this distant place! In those days men believed that the gods dwelt in the rustling trees and in strange-looking stones. Jacob laid his dream to the stone which he had taken for a pillow. It must be a sacred stone, the house of God. So he set it up on end, and poured an offering of oil upon it. Then he went on his way.

III. The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel.

When Jacob came to the old country, he met some men watering sheep at a well, who proved to be acquaintances of his uncle Laban. As he talked with them, Laban's daughter, Rachel, came

along with her sheep to the well. The lonely and tired Jacob was so glad to see her that he cried. Rachel ran and told her father, Laban, that his sister's son had come. He was glad to see him; and the young man stayed with him for two months, helping him tend his sheep. Then Laban proposed to give him wages. The bold Jacob answered that he would take Rachel for his wages, and he would work seven years for her. To this Laban agreed.

IV. Laban's Deceit.

When the seven years were over, the marriage feast was made ready. The bride was given to Jacob veiled, as usual. The next morning he found that he had been deceived. Instead of the beautiful and bright-eyed Rachel, it was her elder sister, Leah, who was plain and had weak eyes. When Jacob asked his uncle what this trick meant, Laban said it was not the custom in that country to allow the younger daughter to marry before the elder. So poor Jacob, who had met his match in his father-in-law, if not in his wife, had to work seven years more for Rachel. This marriage was a most romantic and happy one. Rachel became the mother of Joseph, who was Jacob's favorite, and who had such a romantic career in Egypt, as we shall soon learn, and Benjamin, who took Joseph's place in his father's heart when Joseph had been carried away. From the four wives of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and two others, were descended the twelve tribes of Israel, whose history forms the story of the Old Testament, and from whom came Jesus and the Christian religion.

V. Jacob's Later Years.

As Jacob grew older, his nature seems to have softened and sweetened. Sorrow disciplined him, and it may be that the lovely influence of Rachel affected him greatly. While Esau went to ruin or to uselessness, from Jacob came the best religion the world has seen.

VI. Topics and Questions.

What can you recall about sacred stones or trees or animals? What do you know about Stonehenge and the Druids? Why should men ever think that trees or groves were inhabited by deities? Can you recall any other places in the Old Testament where the gods were spoken of as belonging in certain localities? Where were the Greek gods supposed to live? What is polytheism? What is monotheism? Which did Jacob hold? What did Jesus teach (John iv. 19-24)?

References.—"Bible for Learners," chs. xxiii. and xxiv.; Stanley, Lect. III.; Baring-Gould, xxvii; Geikie, p. 414; Chambers's Cyclopædia, art. "Standing Stones" and "Sculptured Stones."

LESSON XI.

THE MEETING OF JACOB AND ESAU.

(Genesis xxxi. 1-3, 17-55, xxxii., xxxiii.)

LESSON TEXT.— "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous is as bold as a lion."— PROVERBS xxviii. 1.

I. THE CONNECTION (xxxi. 1–3).

Jacob had paid back his father-in-law for his shrewd trick in the matter of his marriage, and had got most of the cattle into his own hands. No wonder that the countenance of Laban "was not toward him as before," and that Jacob should feel inclined to leave the land where he was in Laban's power and go back to Canaan.

II. THE FLIGHT (xxxi. 17–55).

In this his wife Rachel agreed. They packed up all their goods and put their cattle upon the march while Laban was away shearing his sheep. Rachel stole the household idols; for in the old country the religion was still idolatrous. This was too much for Laban to bear. To take away his idols was to take away his gods, who protected and helped him. Now they would help his daughter and be his enemies. So he set out in hot pursuit, and overtook the runaway couple near Mount Gilead, a little before they would have crossed the river Jordan into Canaan. Jacob did not know that his wife had stolen the idols, and was very angry at being accused of the theft. If you find them among us, said he, kill whoever has them. The tents were searched, but Rachel was sitting upon the idols, and her father would not disturb her. Then Jacob had Laban at a disadvantage, and stoutly rebuked him for his unjust accusations. Poor Laban could not answer, and his heart warmed again towards his daughter. He could not do her harm. So he made a treaty of peace with Jacob after the Eastern fashion. They piled up a heap of stones, and ate together upon them. Then they made the pile a witness to their agreement, and called it "Mizpah," or a watch tower. "The Lord," said Laban, "watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." Even to this day this word "Mizpah" is often used on rings or brooches which are given by friends who are about to be separated. The next morning Laban went back to his home, and Jacob went on his way southward.

III. ESAU'S OPPORTUNITY (xxxii. 1–23).

But now a new danger faced Jacob. A man who makes it a practice to cheat his fellow-men finds that days of reckoning come. Jacob had fled to the old country to escape from Esau's vengeance. You remember that Esau had vowed to take Jacob's life as soon as their father Isaac was dead. Isaac was still living, and Esau had made no attempt yet to carry out his threat. But Jacob's

conscience troubled him, and he sent messengers ahead to say to Esau that he was coming back home a rich man, and hoped that Esau would be kind to him.

But the messengers returned with the bad news that Esau was coming to meet Jacob, and that he had four hundred men with him. This was a little army for those days, and Jacob was thoroughly frightened. He divided his caravan into two parts, so that one might escape while Esau was attacking the other. Then he sent a rich present (v. 13) on to his brother, sheep, goats, camels, etc., and divided them into droves so that Esau should meet them one after the other, and be the more impressed by them.

IV. Jacob's Conversion (xxxii. 24–32).

That night was a memorable one in Jacob's life. It was spent alone, at the ford of the river Jabbok, a wild spot, where the torrent rushes noisily down between high stone cliffs. There his past life stood before him in thought, especially the mean tricks by which he had cheated his father and his brother. In the struggle which then took place, the better side of him conquered, and henceforth we see no more of the tricky, over-reaching nature which had marked his life so far, but a gentler and purer spirit. The story is told in figures of speech. God and man wrestle together. God conquers, and the man is no longer called "Jacob," the "supplanter," but Israel, a "prince of God." From that name his descendants are called "children of Israel," or "Israelites," or simply "Israel."

V. Esau's Generosity (xxxiii.).

But Esau, when he saw his brother again after years of separation, and perhaps saw also the change which had taken place in him, felt all his revengeful intentions pass away. The two brothers embraced and wept. Esau would take no presents from Jacob. "I have enough," he said; "keep that thou hast unto thyself." He was a wanderer and needed little to support him. Urged by Jacob, he finally took something. Then the two brothers parted, Esau returning to the wilderness, and Jacob going on his way to begin the history which we all know, and which has so changed the world.

VI. Topics and Questions.

1. Idolatry. What is it and where is it still practised? Are the images in Catholic churches idols? What may be the difference between images and idols? What is the difference between an idol and a statue?
2. Conversion. What does conversion mean? Can a man change his life suddenly? Can he change his wishes suddenly? Can you name any sudden conversions of great men? (Augustine, Bunyan.)
3. Jacob and Esau. What do you think of the two brothers? What was good and what bad in each?

References.— Stanley, Lect. iii.; Geikie, pp. 400–410; "Bible for Learners," ch. xxiii. and xxiv.; Baring-Gould, ch. xxvii.

LESSON XII.

THE STORY OF JOSEPH.

(Genesis, chapters xxxvii., xxxix. 1-6, 20-23, xl,. xli.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"—PSALM cxxxiii. 1.

I. THE STORY.

The Jealousy of the Brothers.—After all his trials, Jacob settled down in the land of Canaan, and led a very quiet life for a while; but new troubles were coming. Joseph was his father's favorite, because he was the son of his old age, and was the first son of his beloved wife Rachel, for whom he had served her father Laban fourteen years. Joseph was now seventeen years old, but, as favorite children are apt to be, was a little weak and babyish. He wore a long coat of many colors which his father had made for him, and of which he was very proud; and he was a little inclined to tell tales on his brothers when they had been out with him tending the flocks. His conceit showed itself, as character often does, in his dreams. Once he dreamed that the sheaves of wheat which his brothers had bound up stood around his and bowed down to it. At another time he dreamed that the sun, moon, and eleven stars came and bowed down to him.

The Conspiracy.—Now we all have strange dreams, but we do not all tell them as having any meaning. This last dream was too much for his brothers to stand, though his father seems to have thought that it meant some great future for him. So the brothers made up their minds to get rid of him somehow. An opportunity came when Joseph was sent from home to see whether they were getting on well with their flocks at some distance. They saw him coming one day, and made up their minds what to do with him. There are in that country cisterns cut down into the rock, and shaped like a short pear with a small opening at the top. Sometimes they are dry. They dropped the boy into one of these dry cisterns, and left him there while they ate their dinner. This was Reuben's plan. The rest wished to kill him; but Reuben thought that, if he could only get him out of the way for a while, he could afterwards rescue him quietly. But, while they were eating, they saw a caravan coming along, carrying down to Egypt the drugs which were used so much then to embalm the dead and make mummies. Judah proposed, as a compromise, that they should sell Joseph to these Ishmaelites. They did so, and got about $12 for him (Lev. xxvii. 5). Reuben was not with them then, so, when he came back and looked into the pit for his brother, he found he was gone. The other brothers did not tell him what had happened, and it was agreed to put blood upon Joseph's coat and carry it so to Jacob. The poor father at once believed that his favorite son had been eaten by wild beasts, and fell into the deepest grief.

Joseph's Fate.—Meantime Joseph was travelling along with the caravan to Egypt. There he was sold to Potiphar, a captain of the life-guard of the Pharaoh, or king, of the land. Being a bright and handsome lad, he soon became a favorite with his master, and at last was made the overseer of his house. But Potiphar's wife quarrelled with him, and he was thrown into prison. Even there, however, he became a favorite again, and so won the good will of the keeper of the prison that he made him a sort of ruler of the prison.

The Interpreter of Dreams.—Among the prisoners were two of the Pharaoh's principal household officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. Both of these men had dreams, and in those days dreams were generally considered to be divine messages foretelling something that was to happen. The chief butler dreamed of a vine with three branches, and of squeezing the juice of the grapes into Pharaoh's cup. Joseph said that this meant that in three days the chief butler would be back in his place, giving wine to the king. The chief baker dreamed of carrying three baskets on his head and of birds eating sweetmeats out of the upper one. This, said Joseph, means that within three days you will be hanged. And it turned out in both cases as Joseph had said.

Pharaoh's Dream.—Two years after this, Joseph being still in prison, the king had a pair of dreams that troubled him very much. The first was of seven thin cattle that ate up seven fat ones. The second was of seven thin ears of corn that ate up seven full ones. The chief butler, who had forgotten Joseph till now, mentioned his power of interpretation to Pharaoh; and he was sent for. The dreams had the same meaning, he said. There should be seven years of full crops and then seven years of famine. He advised that through the good years corn be laid up against the scanty years. Pharaoh was so pleased with this advice that he put the whole matter in the hands of Joseph himself, and made him his Grand Vizier, or deputy. He gave him his ring as a sign of authority, ordered that all men should bow the knee to him when he appeared in public, and married him to the daughter of a priest. So at thirty years of age the Hebrew slave had become the prime minister of one of the greatest nations on the globe.

The Famine.—Then came the years of plenty and the years of dearth. Egypt had corn when the countries around it had none, and it became very rich (xlvii. 13–26). Moreover, when the people of Egypt themselves needed corn, Joseph sold it to them, first in exchange for their cattle, then for their land, and then gave them seed to sow on condition that one-fifth of the crop should be the king's. So Pharaoh became enormously wealthy and his people very poor.

II. TOPICS AND QUESTIONS.

1. **The spoiled child. The tell-tale. The lies of the brothers.** Do you see any resemblance between their characters and that of their father Jacob, as you remember it? What is the meaning of Exodus xx. 5? See also Ezekiel xviii. Have fathers a right to have favorites among their children?

2. **What are dreams?** Do they mean anything? What strange dreams have you ever had? Did any of them ever come true? What were the ancient ideas of them? See Encyclopædia Britannica and Chambers's Encyclopædia, art. "Dream."

3. **The Pharaoh, his power.** Did he do right to sell corn to his own people and take their land and cattle? Are all kings as absolute? What advantages are there in a republic like ours?

REFERENCES.—"Bible for Learners," ch. xxvi.; Geikie, vol. i. last chapter, Stanley, pp. 84–89; Baring-Gould, ch. xxviii. Read the story itself carefully

LESSON XIII.

JOSEPH IN EGYPT.

(Genesis, chapters xlii., xliii., xliv., xlv., xlvi. 1–7, xlvii., l.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Ye that trample upon the poor, and take exactions from him of wheat." "Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." — AMOS v. 11.; ISAIAH i. 17.

I. THE STORY.

The Brothers go to Egypt. — While Joseph was having this strange life in Egypt, Jacob and Reuben believed him to be dead, and the other brothers had no idea where he was. The famine reached Canaan, and it became necessary to send to Egypt for corn. Ten of the brothers went, leaving Benjamin, the youngest of all, Joseph's own brother, the second son of Rachel, at home. When they came before the Prime Minister, who had the corn in charge, they hardly dared to look at the great man, and would not have known him to be their brother if they had. But he knew them, and his first thought was of how they had treated him. He was very harsh with them, and charged them with being spies. He sold them corn, but told them not to come again without bringing the other brother. He kept Simeon as a hostage. He was the next to Reuben in age. Reuben, the oldest, had been too kind to be harmed. On their way home they found every man had his money in the sack on top of the corn. What to make of it they did not know. However, they carried the corn home, and ate it.

The Second Journey. — But when this corn was gone, and the famine was still upon them, it became necessary to go to Egypt again. They did not dare go without Benjamin, but Jacob was terribly grieved to let the other son of Rachel go. He had to do it, however; but he sent back the money which Joseph had returned, and with it some simple presents, such as he had to give, to soften the heart of this strange, great man.

Joseph's Policy. — When Joseph saw his own brother Benjamin again, after so many years, he had to leave the room, so great was his emotion. He released Simeon, and had all the brothers dine with him, but not at the same table; for Egyptians and foreigners must be separated. But he sent portions of food from his table to each of his brothers, which was a compliment in those days. They noticed, however, that he sent five times as much to Benjamin as to any of the rest. He was a very strange man! But they had a very good time with him, these half-starved Hebrews.

But, when they went away, not only did he have their money put back into their sacks with the corn, as before, but in Benjamin's he had his own silver cup placed. Then he sent after them, and accused them of stealing it. When it was found in Benjamin's sack, they were overcome with grief. They went back to the city, and begged that the boy be allowed to go home. It

would kill their father, they said, to lose him. Judah offered to remain in his place.

Joseph breaks down. — This was more than Joseph could bear. He sent away all his attendants, and made himself known to his brothers. What a scene it must have been! And now, he insisted, they must go back to Canaan, and bring their father and all their families down into Egypt, and live there.

The Emigration. — This was great fortune, indeed. Jacob was filled with joy to find not only that Benjamin was safe, but that Joseph was alive, and that he should see his dear boy again before he died. The whole tribe came down into Egypt, and settled in the land of Goshen, on the frontier of Egypt, near the isthmus now called Suez. Some of them became the keepers of the king's cattle, and all were happy and prosperous. The tribe increased fast.

Jacob's Death. — At last the eventful life of Jacob came to an end. He was an old man, had seen good fortune, and died in prosperity. But "few and evil" seemed to have been the years of his life, as he told Pharaoh (xlvii. 9). He had not been a happy man. Perhaps the misdeeds of his early life troubled him, and no doubt he had felt the loss of Rachel sorely. As his end came in sight, he made Joseph promise to carry him back to Canaan, and bury him in the family vault, which he had made in the field of Machpelah. There were Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah; and there was his first wife, Leah. Rachel had died while they were on a journey, and had to be buried near by the place of her death. Joseph promised, and the old man called his sons about him, told them of their faults, and prophesied what sort of life each would have. Then he "gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered to his people." His body was embalmed, in the Egyptian fashion; and, after the forty days required for this process, eighty days of mourning were observed. Then Joseph obtained permission of Pharaoh to go up to Canaan and bury his father.

Joseph's Death. — When Jacob was buried, a great fear fell upon the brothers. What if Joseph should take it into his head now to revenge himself on them? So, when he returned, they sent a messenger to beg forgiveness, in their father's name. Joseph did not palliate their wrong intentions; but he said that God had brought everything out right now, and he would not lay it up against them. So all went on peacefully with the immigrants in their new home. In the course of time, when Joseph saw that his end was to come soon, he made his brothers promise to bury him, too, in the land of his father. But his body was not carried back to the old home till Moses led out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt (Exodus xiii. 19).

II. Topics and Questions.

1. The character of Joseph. The change by adversity. Did he do right in playing upon his brothers' feelings so, and even upon his father's? Was it right to forgive them so easily, or ought he to have punished them further?

2. Joseph's advancement. From poverty to wealth, from obscurity to rank. What was the reason for it? What other boys can you think of who rose to fame from humble families? What made them successful?

3. Embalming. Did you ever see a mummy? There are several in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Why were bodies embalmed?

References. — "Bible for Learners," ch. xxvii., xxviii.; Stanley, Lect. IV. (description of a famine); Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Joseph"; Enc. Brit., art. "Embalming" and "Mummy"; Geikie, vol. i., last chapter.

LESSON XIV.

MOSES' CHILDHOOD.

(Exodus i. 1-14, 22, ii., iii., iv. 1-22.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed."—PSALM ix. 9.

I. THE NEW BOOK.

We begin to-day a new book in the Old Testament. The last one was called *Genesis*, because it told the story of the *beginnings* first of the world, then of the human race, then of the Hebrews. Now the schooling of the Hebrews in Egypt is over. They have had prosperity, but under false gods. Now they are in slavery. Soon Moses is to lead them out of slavery to freedom. The book which tells us of this is called *Exodus*, or the *way out*.

II. MOSES IN EGYPT.

The Slavery of Israel.—So long as Pharaoh whom Joseph had served so well still lived, the people of Joseph were treated kindly. But his successors felt no such obligation; and one of them, as he was about to do a great deal of building, thought it a good plan to set these strangers at work upon it. Egypt was now the mightiest and the most cultivated nation upon earth, and its people despised the shepherd tribe which was settled upon it border.

Baby Moses — But, in spite of all their hardships, the Israelites grew fast in numbers, till Pharaoh began to be afraid of them. So he commanded that every boy should be thrown into the Nile as soon as he was born. Now, one little fellow seemed to his mother so handsome (so the verse says, though every mother thinks that of her baby, only this mother perhaps was braver than some others) that she would not give him up to the royal officers, but hid him as long as she could. Then she made a little boat or basket out of the papyrus reeds that grow in the Nile, and made it water-tight with mud and asphalt, and set it in the water among the bulrushes along the river-bank. Then she went away, because she knew she would be noticed if she hung about, and left his sister to stand near and watch him. Soon the king's daughter came down to bathe, and found the basket floating, and in it was a pretty boy baby, who began to cry as soon as he saw a strange face looking at him. She knew by his features that he was a Hebrew baby, but she felt her heart drawn to him; and, when the baby's sister, who had sauntered up with others, in apparent carelessness, asked if she should not go and get some Hebrew woman to take care of the baby, the princess consented. So the little girl ran away, and brought her and the baby's own mother, who received wages for nursing her own child. But he was brought up as the princess' son, under the name of *Moses*.

Moses' Flight.—But the boy's mother must have told him who he was, and that he was not an Egyptian. When he was grown up and used to go out in his Egyptian dress to see his country-

men at work so hard, he used to get very angry. He could do nothing yet, but he waited for a good time to come. At last, one day he saw an Egyptian overseer beating one of the Hebrew slaves, and he could not stand it any longer. He looked around, and saw that no one else was near, and killed the Egyptian, hiding his body in the sand. But some one had seen it; for, when Moses the next day tried to part two of his countrymen who were fighting, one of them taunted him with the deed. Soon it got to the king's ears, and Moses fled over the border, along the isthmus of Suez, as it is now called, into the land of Midian.

Moses' Commission.—In Midian, Moses married the daughter of a priest, and apparently settled down contentedly to a shepherd's life. But, says the story, one day when he was leading his flock through the desert near a mountain called Horeb, he saw one of the common thorn bushes, which are about all that grow there, apparently on fire without being burned. When he went to see what it was, God called to him, and told him to take off his shoes (which in that country of turbans is the same as taking off one's hat), for he was on holy ground. God had come down, he said, to deliver his people out of slavery, and Moses must go to be the leader. "What!" said Moses: "am I, a poor shepherd, to face the mightiest king in the world?" But God reminded him that he would not go alone. God would be with him. To prove this, his rod was turned into a serpent and back again, and his hand was covered with leprosy, a terrible skin disease, and then instantly cured.

The Last Objection.—But, said Moses, who was a modest man, and indeed might well have shrunk from so terrible a task, I am no orator. I am a very poor speaker. Send some one else, any one you choose, only not me. Then God was angry; and, though he insisted on Moses being leader, he made his brother Aaron the speaker for him. Then Moses resisted no longer, but went to Jethro, his father-in-law, and asked to go to his own people. "And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace."

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Egypt in the time of Moses. The Nile. The tombs. The customs and manners. The religion. How was Moses dressed? How were the Pyramids built? There is no reference to the Israelites in any of the ancient inscriptions.

2. The young patriot. Ought every one to love his own country better than any other? Was it right for Moses to kill the Egyptian? What do you think of the Hebrew who told of him? Did Moses' sister do right in pretending that the nurse she brought was a stranger?

3. Moses' objections. From these came the saying "meek as Moses." Ought we to hold back from a duty because we think we are not able to do it? Ought we to take others' estimate of what we can do rather than our own? Conceit and timidity, which is the more dangerous? What other great men have been poor speakers at first? (Cromwell, Demosthenes, Disraeli, Paul. 1 Cor. ii. 1–4; 2 Cor. x. 10.)

References.—Every teacher should now own Prof. Toy's "History of the Religion of Israel," published by the Sunday-School Society, for fifty cents. Read in this and the next lesson all you can about Egypt in the time of Moses. See Miss Betham-Edwards's books, Brugsch, Wilkinson, Enc. Brit., Bible Dictionary, etc., and Ebers's novel "Uarda." Geikie's, vol. ii, ch. 1–4 are very full, and excellent is Stanley's Lecture IV. "Bible for Learners;" Baring-Gould, pp. 238–261.

LESSON XV.

MOSES AND PHARAOH.

(Exodus, chapters iv. 27-31, v., vi. 1, vii., viii., ix., x., xi., xii. 21-39.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The righteous cried, and the Lord heard, and delivered them out of all their troubles." — PSALM XXXIV. 17.

I. HOW TO READ.

This story of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt was not written as it is till hundreds of years after it all happened. Till then it was handed down from father to son, as family stories are now. There were few books, and little writing was done; and, besides, it was a long time before the nation was enough settled in the Promised Land to be very much civilized. The fact remains, and is a very glorious fact, that Moses, under God's guidance, did lead a very ignorant and feeble nation out from under the very eyes of the mightiest nation of the world, and set them on their way to be a famous people.

II. THE STRUGGLE WITH PHARAOH.

Rousing the People.— On his way back to Egypt, Moses met his brother Aaron, and told him what had happened. Aaron was very glad; and the two went on together to Goshen, where they called the chief men of Israel together, and told them of what they were planning. They, too, were glad. It involved danger, but hardly anything could be worse than their suffering now.

Pharaoh's Defiance.— The brothers went at their work very slyly. They went to the king, and pretended that they feared that they had offended their God, and wished to go "three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord." But Pharaoh, whether he believed this or not, cared nothing for Jehovah, and roughly ordered Moses and Aaron to stop keeping the people from their work. In fact, he ordered the *tale*, or *tally*, or number of the bricks they had to make, to be doubled, and took away the straw which was put into the bricks to make them hold together. Instead of straw, they were to go out and get stalks and twigs and other stubble. So the poor children of Israel were worse off than before, and they were very bitter toward the brothers who had promised them deliverance.

The Plagues.— Then began a contest between the brothers and Pharaoh's magicians. But soon Moses and Aaron silenced them, and the Ten Plagues began. It is impossible to tell the story of these in our space. It is very interesting, and should be read as it stands in the text. The Ten Plagues, as they are called, were those of the river turned to blood, frogs, lice, flies, cattle plague, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the first-born. Again, we must remember that the stories grew up out of the dim remembrances of what happened centuries before. All of these so-called plagues are recollections of strange or tormenting

things, which still happen in Egypt, though not in Palestine, where the Israelites afterwards lived. Strange things grew in memory to miraculous things.

The Foundation of the Stories.— 1. At certain times of the year the sacred river Nile becomes red from the mud which is washed down from certain hills. 2. "An alarming increase of frogs is not unusual" (B. for L.), like little toads, after a shower, only far more numerous. 3. In certain kinds of weather, lice and mosquitoes abound, and are very distressing. 4. "The common fly is, at the present day, the most troublesome insect in Egypt" (Bib. Dict.). 5. "In modern times murrain is not an infrequent visitation" (B. for L.). 6. "May be supposed to have been either an infliction of boils, or a pestilence like the plague of modern times, which is an extremely severe kind of typhus fever, accompanied by swellings" (Bib. Dict.). 7. "Hail and thunder are not unknown in the Delta, though rare" (Pocket Commentary, B. for L.). 8. The plague of locusts still devastates the East, and is not uncommon. 9. A strange darkness still comes upon Egypt, brought by a wind called the *chemsin*, and usually lasting three days. 10. The death of the first-born is probably a reminiscence of some terrible pestilence, which attacked especially the children. On this whole matter see Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Plagues."

Hardening Pharaoh's Heart.— After each of these plagues, it is said that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go." In fact, God had promised Moses that he would do so, that he might have reason for even heavier punishments. But, when this last plague came, his spirit was broken. He sent for Moses and Aaron, and told them to go and serve the Lord as they had asked (v. 3). He does not yet seem to suspect that they mean to go away entirely. On the contrary, when the Israelites *borrowed* jewels and clothing, they lent them readily. But the Israelites meant never to return them. They set out in a great multitude, taking such food as they could find, their bread hastily mixed and unleavened. So began the Exodus, about 1330 B.C.

The Passover.— The great feast of the passover, though it probably existed in some form before this time, as a spring festival, now took on a new meaning. It commemorated the time when the Angel of Death *passed over* the families of the Israelites, and struck the first-born of the Egyptians only. It was the Hebrew Fourth of July, with a religious light upon it. It is dear to us as the time when Jesus made the passover meal the Last Supper with his apostles (Luke xii.).

III. Topics and Questions.

1. *Legends.*— What is a legend? What is a miracle? What legends can you recall from other sources? What miracles reported outside the Bible? What kind of stories have we a right to believe?

2. *Pious Lies.*— Did God really tell Moses to borrow what he did not mean to return (iii. 17-22)? Were the Israelites right in "spoiling the Egyptians"? Are "all things fair in war"?

3. Does God harden men's hearts? If a boy lies, does he not find lying grow easier? Is it not easier to a boy to be cruel, if he is habitually cruel, than if he is usually kind? Then does not God harden hearts? Is not dulness of conscience a part of the punishment of sin?

References.— Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Plagues"; Geikie, vol. ii., ch. v.; Stanley, Lect. V; "Bible for Learners"; Baring-Gould, pp. 261-268; Toy's "History of the Religion of Israel."

LESSON XVI.

MOSES CROSSING THE RED SEA.

(Exodus, chapters xiii. 17-22, xiv., xv. 20-27, xvi., xvii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The Lord maketh a path in the mighty waters."—ISA. xliii. 16.

I. THE STORY.

The Roundabout Road.—Instead of leading his people along the direct road to Canaan, Moses led them down the eastern shore of the Red Sea into the wilderness. It was not as bare there as it is now, but it was not so rich a country as the Promised Land. But the kings of Palestine were powerful, and in league with Egypt. It would not do to have this undisciplined mob of men, women, and children face such warriors. There must be time taken to change these slaves into men of war.

The Fiery Pillar.—It was the custom, when an army marched, to carry torches, or sometimes a holy fire on a silver altar. In that still air the smoke rises very straight and high, so that it makes a tall column by day, while the flame is seen as clearly in the night. In later ages the descendants of these fugitives looked back upon this as the presence of God himself in fire and smoke.

Caught in a Trap.—In those days the Red Sea, it is said, extended farther north than it does now, to the Bitter Lakes. Here was a shallow stretch of water (though over a man's head), about a mile wide, which lay directly across the path of the fugitives. Meantime Pharaoh had found out the trick that had been played upon him. His slaves had not gone out for three days to sacrifice, as they said, but were running away. So he gathered his army, especially the cavalry and chariots for which Egypt in the ancient days was celebrated, and which remained a terror to the Israelites long after they were settled in Canaan. After them he rushed, and caught them where it seemed that they could not get away from him. The poor slaves, their spirit having been taken out of them by bondage, were in great fear, and turned upon their leader. Were there no graves for us in Egypt, they cried (sarcastically, for Egypt was full of graves, especially in the north, where they had been), that he should bring them out here to die in this cheerless place?

The Low Tide.—Then happened what has happened several times since then, there and elsewhere. A strong north-east wind, blowing when the tide was naturally ebbing, forced back the shallow waters. Moses took advantage of this providential way of escape, and led his people quickly across. The Egyptians pursued, but, by the time they were well into the gulf, the tide had turned, the wind had gone down or changed, the waters came back, the chariot wheels dragged heavily in the wet sand, and the king and his army, so proud and triumphant a little while before, were caught and drowned. Of course, in the lapse of time this natural event grew into a miracle. But it is clear to those who have been

there that God worked his will by common causes. It is said that, though the mummies of the other kings of this Pharaoh's family have been found, no trace of him has been ever discovered, and that it is known that the prosperity of Egypt for a long time after this was seriously hurt.

Songs of Triumph.— We can imagine the joy of the Israelites, so strangely and suddenly saved when they seemed doomed to death or slavery. They sang a song or ode of triumph. Aaron's sister, Miriam, led a sacred dance, such as the young women of Egypt still dance at the rising of the Nile, with song and tambourine. But there was something to do besides dancing and singing. There was no time to waste, and they pressed on down the coast. They suffered for want of water in that wild country. They found some at Marah, but the name (bitter) proved too true till Moses, who during his stay in Midian had learned a great deal of the craft of the desert, put in branches (perhaps of the barberry, which is still used for this purpose) which made the water taste somewhat better.

The Mysterious Supply of Food.— The poor slaves found that freedom was not all happiness. Like our freedmen, they found that, when they were slaves, they had at least something to eat, but now, when they had to depend on themselves, food had to be looked for. Soon they were complaining once more against Moses for bringing them out. But that night quails fell upon the ground; and a strange substance, like balls of frost, came down in the early morning. They did not know what to make of these things. "Man-hu" (What is it)? they cried when they saw the white stuff, and "manna" it was always called. It seems to have been the gum which falls from a tree called the tamarisk, oozing out of the twigs when flies have bitten them. It is still found there, though not so abundantly; for the trees have been cut away. The flies deposit their eggs in the gum; and these eggs hatch into worms if the stuff is not soon strained and eaten. As for the quails, large flocks of them often fly across that country, and, being exhausted, fall to the earth in numbers. As for the mysterious supply of water spoken of in xvii. 6, it came by the same wood-craft or wilderness-craft of Moses which we have seen already. Pushing his staff through some choked crevice, he made the hidden water gush out, as is still done. Nevertheless, the quails and the manna and the water were of God, who made them and placed them where his children could find them if they tried and learned how.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. The influence of slavery upon slaves. Their dependence makes them weak and shiftless. The difference to the negroes between slavery and liberty. What was the effect upon the masters?

2. Mobs *vs.* armies. Why can a few disciplined troops stand against many times as many unorganized men? The advantage of organization for any purpose.

3. The folly of fear and worry. We never can tell what may happen to help us, or what we can do, if, instead of wasting our energy in worry, we spend it in calm thinking and planning. The Israelites between Pharaoh and the Red Sea (xiv. 15).

References.— Be sure to read Geikie, vol. ii., ch. vi. and vii., for vivid description of the march and the wilderness. "Bible for Young People," vol. ii., ch. iv., v., and vi.; Stanley, i., 132–162. Smith's "Bible Dictionary," art. "Red Sea, Passage of"; Baring-Gould, pp. 268–281.

LESSON XVII.

MOSES AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

(Exodus, chapters xviii., xix., xx. 1-17.)

LESSON TEXT.— "Jesus said, The first commandment of all is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. The second is this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." — MARK xii. 30, 31.

I. THE PLACE.

The Red Sea divides, at the top, into a Y. Between the two upper branches is a mountainous, pointed peninsula. One of these mountains had been for ages considered a sacred mountain. Moses must have known of it when he lived with his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. Perhaps it was to seek this holy place that he led the Israelites down here, away from Palestine. It is an awful place. The rock is strangely colored, red, dark green, and purple. The mountains are steep and bare. Strange noises are heard echoing among them, sometimes from avalanches of sand, sometimes like reports of artillery, and unaccountable. Except for these, there is dead silence.

II. THE NEW CONSTITUTION.

As the coming out of Egypt was like our War of Independence, so the Ten Commandments are like our Constitution, the first laws of the nation. The first change that Moses made was to appoint judges to assist him in hearing and deciding cases (xviii. 17). This he did under the advice of Jethro, and it may be that this same priest had much to do with the laws which followed. But the Jews always believed that the Ten Commandments were given to Moses directly by God himself; that God called Moses and Aaron to the top of the mountain, and there, in the midst of thunders and lightnings, gave them the ten laws on two tablets of stone. Around these laws grew up in time a great many others, which were also said to have been given by Moses.

The Ten Commandments.— 1. There is some doubt as to how the first two laws should be divided, but usually the first is considered to be "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The people of that day believed that there were many gods. The Israelites believed this, too. The First Commandment, therefore, was to shut all other gods out of worship. Jehovah alone henceforth was to be their God.

2. The Second Commandment may seem to us useless. We do not worship idols. But the Israelites had just come out of Egypt where idols were worshipped everywhere by the common people; and it was necessary to stop this, as far as it had spread among the chosen people. Besides, far back in the old country from which Abraham had come there had been idolatry, which had more or less remained among the Hebrews when they came down into Egypt. The golden calf, which we shall by and by find them worshipping, may have been a remembrance of Haran.

3. The Third Commandment seems to have been understood as forbidding false oaths,— taking the name of the Lord to a lie. Others think it referred to profanity, and still others to giving the name of Jehovah to an idol, which was called "a nothing." It may mean all of these, using the sacred name when it ought not to be used.

4. The Fourth Commandment forbids working on the Sabbath, or seventh day of the week. There were Sabbaths before this, but the day was now adopted into the new constitution and made binding on the new nation. The Jews in after years became very strict upon this point; and their ideas passed over into the Christian Sunday, though this is a very different day, and was never meant as a successor to the old Sabbath, which had quietly dropped out of use. "Holy" means here, as we see by verse 9, sacred to rest, to freedom from labor. A different reason is given in Deut. v. 12.

5. The Fifth Commandment provided for strict obedience to parents. The father had absolute power over his children in the old days, could, in some nations, put them to death or sell them into slavery. This was because there was often no other authority than his. When the families of shepherds lived apart from each other, the father was the king or judge in himself. The commandment provides for respect and reverence for the authority and judgment of both father and mother. When they were old and helpless, they were to be tenderly cared for, and not, as in some tribes, put to death. The Hebrew law was very hard on disobedience to parents.

6. The Sixth Commandment was directed against murder. Even now life is not always safe; but in those days, when men lived more apart from each other, murder was much more frequent. The right to life is one of the first rights of every one to need protection.

7. The Seventh Commandment protects the family and ordains that every one shall live a pure life.

8. The Eighth Commandment protects property as the sixth protects life. If we cannot keep what we earn, we shall not try to earn anything, and all labor and business will stop.

9. The Ninth Commandment forbids perjury and lying. If men are allowed to say what they like against each other, no reputation is safe. The commandment also implies that false gossip or tale-bearing, or any kind of speech that hurts another, is wrong.

10. The Tenth Commandment passes from the outward act to the inward feeling. Not only must we not steal another's goods, but we must not even long for them. Longing leads to temptation; and, if the temptation is allowed to remain in the mind too long, we shall find doing very easy.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Sacred places, especially mountains, as Olympus. Why should mountains have been considered the dwelling-places of gods?
2. The Commandments. Consider them separately in their various bearings, and read Matt. v. 17-48 and Mark xii. 28-34.

References.— Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine;" Geikie, ii. 281-305; Toy, Lesson IV.; "Bible for Young People," ch. vii. and ix.; Stanley, Lect. VII.

LESSON XVIII.

THE PROMISED LAND.

(Num. xiii., xiv ; Deut. xxxiv.)

LESSON TEXT.— "Be strong and of a good courage; . . . for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."— JOSH. i. 9.

I. THE STORY.

The Spies.— Now that the Israelites had their laws and some sort of organization, they began to think more about the work before them. The Promised Land was not to be conquered without a struggle. In fact, they knew very little about it. Centuries had passed since their ancestors had left it, and what had happened there during that time they had never heard. So the first thing to be done was to find out what sort of a country it was and who lived in it. Moses chose one man out of each of the tribes, and sent the twelve up north to spy out the land. Of these twelve, two were to be famous,— Joshua, who was to be Moses' successor, and Caleb, who was to be one of Joshua's best lieutenants.

The Reconnoissance.— So the twelve went up together, perhaps travelling by night and hiding by day, through the whole land almost up to Mount Lebanon, at the very north of the Promised Land. They examined the land, whether it was fertile and what crops it would bear, the trees, what fruits they bore, and the people, how they lived, what arms they carried, whether they were likely to be easily conquered or not. It was late in July or early in August, and the grapes were ripe. They were very large and luscious, as they are still where they are cultivated; and they found one bunch so huge that they slung it on a pole between two men, not only because it was heavy, but because that was the best way to keep it from being bruised. They found it in the south, so that they did not have far to carry it.

The Cowards.— After forty,— that is, many,— days they came back to make their report. There was what we should call a majority report and a minority report. All agreed that it was a beautiful country, "flowing with milk and honey," as the saying was in those days; that is, full of good pasturage for cattle and of natural products. But ten of the twelve said that the inhabitants were very warlike and had large, fortified cities. One of the tribes, by the name of Anak, had especially terrified them. Then they reeled off a list of the fierce tribes that they had found, the Amalekites in the south, the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Ammonites in the mountains of the interior, and the Canaanites along the seacoast and the river Jordan.

The Heroes.— At this a great cry of fear rose among the people. A kind of panic fell upon them, and they wept all night. Would to God that they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness! What could they do against such enemies? It would be better to go back to Egypt, and they actually proposed to elect a leader

and return. Caleb and Joshua in vain described the plenty that awaited them, and urged them to be brave, and to remember that God was on their side. Moses and Aaron could do nothing with them. Long slavery had killed their courage, and they were like frightened children.

The Sentence.— It was not the first time that the people had lost faith; and now, says the story, God lost patience with them. They should never see the Promised Land. All should die in the wilderness except the brave Joshua and Caleb. He even threatened to kill them all with a pestilence, but Moses argued him out of this by appealing to his pride. These hostile tribes up there would think that he *could* not conquer them, said the shrewd Moses. God relented so far as to allow the children to go up when their parents were dead, but *they* must wander forty years, till the last coward of them was dead.

The Rash Attempt.— When Moses told this to the people, they were frightened again, and rushed into foolish boldness. They would go forward, and show the Lord what they could do, and they went ahead like a mob. The Amalekites and the Canaanites made an easy prey of them, and drove them back with great slaughter.

The Death of Moses.—Not even the great leader was to see the Promised Land. It was supposed that he had committed some sin against God, perhaps by his impatience at Meribah (Num. xx. 10). He was an old man, but still vigorous, and it seems hard that he could not have seen his people at least arrive in the land to the border of which he had led them and in which they were to be so great. He did look into it from the top of Mount Nebo, and then died. He was buried in a valley near by, but no one has ever known just where. Joshua became leader in his place, but no successor was ever so great as he.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. Courage. Had all the Israelites been as brave as Caleb and Joshua, they might have gone at once into the Promised Land. Fear brings about the very trouble which is feared, while courage overcomes that which it sets at naught. Whatever we try to do, we are more likely to do if we believe we can do it than if we fear we cannot.
2. The leader's death. How much we owe to men who themselves never saw the results of their labors! So Lincoln died just as his nation was about to enjoy the fruit of his energy and wisdom. But we must be content if we, too, can do something for those who come after us.

References.— Geikie, ii., ch. xii.; "Bible for Young People," ii., ch. viii., ix.; Stanley, Lect. VIII.; Baring-Gould, p. 284; "Bible Dictionary," art. "Moses," "Nebo," "Meribah."

LESSON XIX.

BALAAM AND THE ASS.

(Numbers xxii., xxiii., xxiv., xxxi. 8, 16; Micah vi. 5-8.)

LESSON TEXT.—"All that the Lord speaketh, that must I do."—NUM. xxiii. 26.

I. THE CONNECTION.

The tribes of slaves whom we saw gathered at the foot of Sinai have rapidly become a warlike nation. They sweep up from the wilderness of the peninsula towards the Promised Land, conquering as they go, till they reach the frontiers of Moab, on the east of the Dead Sea. The fame of their valor has spread far and wide, and the natives that lie in their pathway are stricken with terror.

II. THE STORY.

The Frightened King.—The king of the Moabites was named Balak, the Spoiler. This seems to show that he had a reputation for bravery; but the fame of the Israelites is too much for him, and he dares not trust to his army alone. He must have magic.

The Soothsayer.—On the banks of the Euphrates lived a prophet, or seer, of great reputation, by the name of Balaam, the Devourer. It was believed that he had such favor with God that whatever he cursed was doomed. We saw what power a blessing was supposed to have, when coming from a father, in the story of Isaac blessing Jacob. To this Balaam, Balak sent messengers to ask him to come and curse this "people come out of Egypt." Balaam promised to consult God; but he found that he was not to curse this people, because God had blessed them. But Balak sent again with offer of great rewards. Balaam seems to have been tempted to go, and tried the Lord again. God was angry that Balaam should tamper with his conscience so, but let him go.

The Speaking Ass.—The angel (or messenger) of the Lord appeared in the way; but Balaam, bent on his errand, did not see him. The ass which he rode did, however, and turned out of the road into the field. Balaam beat her back into the path again. When the path led between two walls and the angel appeared again, the ass crushed Balaam's foot against one of the walls, but squeezed by the angel. A third time she could not get past, but fell. Then, says the story, the ass remonstrated with her rider; and he saw the angel of the Lord. Then he dismounted and fell on his face, offering to go back; for he felt that he was doing wrong to go. The angel told him to go on, only not to say anything but what he bade him speak.

Blessing instead of Cursing.—Balak met the seer in great state, and took him to one of the worshipping places of Baal, the god of Moab. There Balaam had seven altars built and sacrifices performed on every one of them. Meanwhile he went apart to commune with God, to see if he might not utter the curse for

which Balak was to pay him so richly. But God bade him bless this people. He returned to where Balak was waiting for him. The king and his princes stood around him to hear the curse that was to blast their enemies. But, to their amazement, Balaam launched forth into a flood of blessing. This people was to be great and powerful.

The Struggle with Conscience.— Balaam evidently hoped that he might be allowed to curse Israel. He tried other places, hoping that God might change his mind or be bribed by rich sacrifices. But it was of no use. "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there divination against Israel. The Lord his God is with him," was what he felt compelled to say to the baffled Balak.

The Final Blessing.— At last Balaam gave up the struggle, and poured out a most eloquent blessing upon Israel. He looked afar off, and saw the tents of Israel in the plains; but he saw also the glory that was to come, the great king that was to arise and conquer all his enemies, and he broke out into poetry: —

> "I see him, but not now:
> I behold him, but not nigh:
> There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
> And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel,
> And shall smite through the corners of Moab,
> And break down all the sons of tumult."
>
> (*Revised Version.*)

Then he pronounced the doom of the powerful Amalekites and the gradual disappearance and final captivity of the Kenites. Balak got what he had never bargained for, and turned away, while Balaam went back to his distant home.

The Fate of Balaam.— But Balaam seems not to have been altogether sincere. In xxxi. 16 it is said that he led the children of Israel into the impure worship of Baal; and, in xxxi. 8, that, when Israel conquered the Midianites, they found among the slain the body of Balaam, the son of Beor. He had played with his conscience too long, fell into temptation, took the side of Israel's enemies, and died with them.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. The belief in cursing and blessing. Recall what was said in Lesson VIII. Compare the idea of witches, medicine-men, clairvoyants, etc.
2. That Balaam was a worshipper of God, though he was not of Israel, shows that the worship of God was not confined to one people.
3. Treatment of animals. Their intelligence and fidelity.
4. Tampering with conscience. Resist evil, and it will flee from you.

References.— Geikie, ii. 408-416; Stanley, i. 209-215; "Bible for Young People," iii. 261-275; Smith's "Bible Dictionary."

LESSON XX.

JOSHUA AT JERICHO.

(Joshua ii., iii., vi.)

Lesson Text.—"In God have I put my trust: what can man do against me?" — Psalm lvi. 11.

I. The Connection.

You remember that Moses sent up twelve men to spy out the land, but that they (except Caleb and Joshua) so frightened the people that they did not dare to go up and conquer it. So they wandered about in the wilderness for many years. Then Moses died, and Joshua took his place. The people had by this time become hardened and disciplined, and now began the conquest of the Promised Land. They had come up on the eastern side of the Jordan, the opposite side from where the Land was. Now they are about to cross the river.

II. The Story.

The Spies.—The tribes lay encamped in a valley just across the river Jordan, while Joshua sent two men over to reconnoitre. They came to Jericho, a powerful city, well fortified, and fed by a richly watered and fertile country. It was the military key of the land. If it were captured, the way to the Promised Land would be open. The two spies stole into the city, and there found a woman who was willing to take them into her house. The reason of this hospitality was, it seems from verse 9, that she had heard what a powerful nation the Israelites were, and how they had conquered so many tribes already, and that she was sure that Jericho would fall into their hands. So she played the traitor to her own countrymen, and begged the spies to see that she was spared when the city should be taken.

The Narrow Escape.— The king of Jericho had heard that strangers had come to town, and that they were Israelite spies, so he caused search to be made for them. They were tracked to Rahab's house, but she had hidden them under the bundles of flax which were drying on the top of the house. The house-tops of the East are used like our back yards. They are flat, and surrounded by a low wall. Rahab then told the king's messengers that the men left her about dark, and she did not know whither they had gone, but she thought that, if the messengers started out at once, they might overtake them. Then she went up and warned the spies to flee. Her house was on the city wall, with windows looking out over it. Out of one of these windows she lowered the two men, and told them to run to the mountain, and hide there three days. This they did, and reached the army again in safety.

The Jordan Crossed.—They told Joshua of the fear which the power of Israel had spread throughout Canaan, and prophesied an easy victory. So the next morning the nation formed in solemn

procession, the priests bearing the ark containing the stone tablets of the Commandments going ahead, and crossed the river into the land which was to be their home, and in which their descendants were to be so famous. The story is that, as the Red Sea had divided before Moses, that the Israelites might pass through it with ease, so the waters of the Jordan stopped flowing when the priests with the ark stepped into them, banking up above them as if stopped by an invisible dam, and running dry below them.

Jericho Captured. — When the inhabitants of Jericho heard that the Israelites were coming, they drew back into the city and closed the gates. Instead of attacking the city, Joshua adopted a very strange proceeding. A procession was formed of seven priests, each bearing a ram's horn trumpet, and the ark, with the armed men divided into an advance-guard, ahead of them, and a rear-guard behind them. Then all marched around the city once a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day. At the end of the seventh time on the seventh day the priests blew their trumpets, and all the people shouted. Then, says the story, the walls of the city fell flat, and the Israelites rushed in unhindered.

Explanation. — It is hard to understand how this could have taken place. Earthquakes were and are very common in that region; and it may be that, while the Israelites were having some religious procession, perhaps expecting God to deliver the city somehow into their hands, one of these earthquakes made a breach in the walls. Out of this natural occurrence, as the centuries went by, may have grown this strange story.

The Massacre. — Every man, woman, and child, and every animal in the city, were then put to death, with the exception of Rahab and her relatives, whom the spies had promised to spare. Everything was burned, except such treasures as could be used in the Israelites' worship.

Excuses. — There are two excuses offered for this cruel treatment of the Canaanites: First, that it was a not uncommon practice of the day. We know, from the records, that these very Canaanites did the same to cities which they had captured. The American Indians were even more cruel, torturing their captives to death. Secondly, that the inhabitants of Jericho had a religion which was not only false, but which was very wicked and corrupting. The only way to secure the Israelites from being themselves corrupted was to root out the whole nation. We shall see later how this proved true where the Canaanites were allowed to remain.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Was Rahab justified in betraying her native city? How did she differ from Benedict Arnold?
2. Was it right for Rahab to lie as she did when she said that the spies had gone?
3. What do you think of the massacre of the Canaanites?

References. — "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xii.; Stanley, vol. i. p. 259; Geikie, vol. ii. pp. 444–452; Bible Dictionary, art. "Jericho," "Joshua."

LESSON XXI.

GIDEON AND THE ANGEL.

(Judges iv. 1-24; vi. 1-32.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, . . . from weakness were made strong, put to flight the armies of the aliens."—HEB. xi. 33, 34.

I. THE CONNECTION.

"The Book of Judges" ought rather to have been called "The Book of Heroes." It tells of the brave men and women who arose in times of the degradation and almost slavery of Israel, and led the people in rebellion against their oppressors. Some of its stories, as those of Jephthah, Gideon, and Samson, are very famous and very interesting. After the Israelites had got possession of the Promised Land, they grew lazy and cowardly, and scattered, and were an easy prey to the warlike tribes about them. They fell into the idolatrous and wicked religion of those tribes, and forgot the Jehovah who had delivered them out of Egypt and led them to the land of rest. The Book of Judges tells how they won back their independence and became united again, driving out their oppressors, as the American colonies did in the Revolution, except that the Israelites were hundreds of years, instead of seven, in gaining their liberty.

II. THE STORY OF GIDEON.

The Midianites.— The country east and south of the Jordan was infested with fierce and wandering Arab tribes, such as to-day we call Bedouins; and then, as now, they used to sweep across the Jordan and carry away all they could get, even enslaving the inhabitants. One tribe of these, the Midianites, whom we have met already in the peninsula of Sinai, had gradually edged northward in the wake of the Israelites, and now were paying off old scores. The centre of Canaan especially was exposed to them, and they drove the weak and scattered children of Israel into the dens and caves which abound in the limestone hills.

The Deliverer.— Finally, one young man could not stand it any longer. He brooded over it till one day, when he was threshing his wheat, in the bottom of a wine-vat cut in the rock, where the invaders could not see him, he thought he saw the angel of the Lord standing before him and telling him that the Lord had sent him to tell Gideon that he was to lead his people against the Midianites. Gideon protested, just as Moses did, that he was not worthy of such a mission or able to carry it out.

The Sign.— To make sure that the Lord had sent the word, and that he might rely upon him, Gideon asked for a miracle. The angel told him to put the bread and meat, which he had brought out for him, upon a rock, and pour the broth over it. He did so, and the angel touched them with the staff which

he carried, and fire came up out of the rock and burnt them all. Then Gideon was frightened. He had seen an angel of the Lord, and he was afraid that he should die. But the angel comforted him, and he built an altar to Jehovah on that spot which lasted for many generations.

The Insult to Baal.— But it was a dangerous thing to worship Jehovah in the midst of the Midianites; for they believed in another god, Baal, and had built an altar to him near where Gideon lived. The young man felt very bold now, however, and not only stood by Jehovah, but made up his mind to show his hatred of Baal. So he took ten servants, and went by night to where the altar of Baal was. By its side stood a wooden pillar (which our translation wrongly calls a "grove") which was honored in the Baal worship. Gideon and his servants threw them both down, and quietly went home.

The Sarcasm of Joash.— The next morning there was a great hubbub in the city. The Midianites found their sacred place profaned, and soon discovered who had done it. They rushed after Joash, Gideon's father, and demanded that his son be given up to them, to be put to death. But Joash was a shrewd man; and, though he did not dare to stand up for his son directly, he quietly asked the wrathful Midianites why they should trouble themselves to defend Baal. If he was a god, he could take care of himself. They could not answer this, and went away.

Another Sign.— But the insult to Baal seems to have brought the enmity of Israel and the Arabs to a head, and soon a regular battle was about to be fought. Gideon could hardly believe yet that he was to be the Washington of this Revolution, and he demanded another miracle. The night wind that sweeps over Palestine is laden with great moisture, and makes a heavy dew, soaking all clothes, etc. Gideon spread a fleece on his threshing floor, and demanded that the dew should be allowed to fall upon this only, leaving the ground about it dry. This was done. Not content yet, he asked the reverse of this, that the ground be wet and the fleece left dry. This also was done; and Gideon, satisfied that God meant him to be the leader of his people, prepared himself and them for the war.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Read the story of Jael and Sisera in iv. 1-24.
2. Think of the stories of Ethan Allen in Vermont, and Marion in South Carolina, during the Revolution, as examples of heroes like "Judges."
3. "Signs" in those days were very much what they are to-day; that is, accidents which are interpreted as lucky or unlucky.

References.— Geikie, vol. ii.: read ch. xiv. and xv. to show the condition of Israel at this time, and pp. 556-561 on Gideon; "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xvii.; Stanley, Lecture XIII., "Israel under the Judges," and Lecture XV., "Gideon,"; Milman, i. 295.

LESSON XXII.

GIDEON'S BAND.

(Judges, chapters vii., viii. 1—26, ix., xi.)

LESSON TEXT.—"There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."—1 SAM. xiv. 6.

I. THE STORY.

The Sifting.— An immense number of Israelites had gathered to follow Gideon. They had borne the oppression of the Midianites as long as they could, and now they were to make a desperate effort to drive them out of the land. But they were unorganized and undisciplined, a mere mob; and they had been intimidated by the fierce Arabs till there was no counting on their bravery. So Gideon complied with the law laid down in Deuteronomy (xx. 8), and proclaimed that whoever was fearful might turn back home. Twenty-two thousand left upon this, and only ten thousand remained. But even they were too many, so he led them to a spring and watched how each man drank. Those that threw themselves upon their knees and put their heads down to the water he dismissed; for he had to deal with a crafty and watchful enemy, like our Indians, and he would have no such careless soldiers. But those that lifted the water to their mouths with their hands, holding their faces up where their eyes could keep watch about them, he kept, though there were only three hundred of them. They took only what victuals they could carry in their hands, and prepared for battle on the morrow.

The Reconnoissance.— In the night it occurred to Gideon to go over and examine the camp of his enemies. The Midianites had gained the assistance of the Amalekites and other Arabian tribes, and they "lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand of the seaside for multitude" (v. 12). But Gideon took his servant, Phurah, and crept over among them. There he overheard one of them telling one of his comrades a dream he had just had. In those days dreams were thought to be prophecies, and the comrade answered with an interpretation. The loaf of barley bread that came rolling down into the camp and upsetting the royal tent was the sign of the sword of Gideon, into whose hands his God had delivered his enemies. Gideon knew by this that his enemies were afraid of him, and he made up his mind to take advantage of this fear.

The Stratagem.— Gideon went directly back to his little army, and divided it into three parts, so as to attack the camp on three sides. Each man had a trumpet, an earthen pot, and a small torch, which was hidden in the earthen pot. They took their places; and at a signal each one smashed the earthen pot and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and then blew his trumpet.

The Panic.— The crash of the earthen pots, the sudden glare of the torches, the shouts and the clangor of the trumpets, frightened the sleeping Arabs, so that they were panic-stricken. In the dark each took his fellow for the enemy, and the slaughter by this was great. Then they all broke and ran, the three hundred after them. Messengers were sent to the great tribe of Ephraim, who took possession of the fords of the Jordan and killed all who came there. Two princes of the Midianites, Oreb and Zeeb, were taken, and their heads brought to Gideon.

Fame.—It was a famous victory, which Israel never forgot. The poets and prophets counted it among the glories of Hebrew history. (See Psalm lxxxiii. 11–18 and Isa. x. 26.) The same stratagem was repeated in an Arab battle in the middle of the last century; and in Egypt, still, earthen pots or jars are used to hide the lights of an armed force marching by night.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. Compare with Gideon's band the valiant defenders of Thermopylæ against the Persian host.
2. What other instances of the victory of a small but brave force over a much larger one can you recall? Is God "always" on the side of the strongest battalions?
3. Read the conclusion of the battle in chapters viii. 1-26, and the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah, two other "Judges," in chapters ix., x., and xi.
4. Compare with the story of Jephthah's daughter that of Iphigenia.

References.—Geikie, ii. 561-567; Stanley, Lecture XV.; "Bible for Young People," ii. ch. xvii.

LESSON XXIII.

THE STORY OF SAMSON.

(Judges xiv.—xvi.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Wisdom is better than strength." Eccl. ix. 16.

I. THE STORY.

The Consecrated Child.—Samson was the son of Manoah, a man of the tribe of Dan, on the eastern coast of Canaan, and just north of the land of the Philistines, who at this time were the oppressors of Israel. In consequence of visions which his mother had seen, she had consecrated him to God, as what was called a "Nazarite." In token of this, his hair was never to be cut. The boy, however, did not fulfil the hopes of his mother, and was anything but a saint. He became renowned for his strength, and may be called the Hebrew Hercules. Many were the stories which were told of his muscular power.

The Riddle.—Young Samson happened to go down to a village of the Philistines, and saw a woman whom he wished for his wife. His father and mother protested against his marrying out of his race, but he persisted; and, after the Eastern custom, they went with him to arrange the match. On the way he killed a young lion that roared at him. When he went down again, to the wedding, he found that, as happens in those dry, hot climates, the body of the lion had dried up into a mere shell, and that a swarm of bees had made honey in it. So at the wedding he gave out one of those riddles which were among the amusements of that time, and offered a prize of thirty sheets and thirty changes of robes to whoever would guess it, they to give him the same if they could not guess it. The seven days of the wedding festivities were almost over, when they gave up the riddle, and induced Samson's wife to try to get the answer out of him. At last, by persistent coaxing and crying, she made him tell her; and she told them. But Samson was so enraged that he killed thirty of their fellow-countrymen and stripped them for the means to pay his forfeit: then, having had enough of the Philistines, he left his wife, and went back home.

Revenge on the Philistines.—Later Samson went back to his wife, but found that her father had given her to his former groomsman. Enraged at this, he caught a pack of jackals, tied firebrands to their tails, and drove them into the rich grain-fields of the Philistines, then drying for the harvest. This is considered an insult as well as an injury in the East, and the Philistines mustered to punish the offender. But he had fled to a cleft in the top of a rocky hill. The Philistines came and surrounded him. His countrymen, of the tribe of Judah, were so alarmed that they determined to surrender him to save themselves. Samson submitted to be bound, on condition that they should not hurt him, and went down as if to give himself up to the Philistines. But,

when they thought they had him, he burst his bonds, picked up the jawbone of an ass, and killed a thousand of them with it. The spring of water spoken of in v. 19 did not come from the jawbone, as our translation makes it, but from the place Lehi, which happens to mean a jawbone. In fact, this name may be the foundation of the whole story,— the thousand were slain not *with*, but *in* Lehi.

Betrayed.— One night it became known that Samson was in Gaza, a city of the Philistines; and some of the inhabitants lay in wait for him. But he not only got away, but took the two posts of the city gate and the cross-bar with them on his shoulders, and carried them twenty miles away, up a very steep hill. But at last the secret of his strength was discovered. Delilah, a Philistine woman with whom he was in love, set on by her countrymen whom he had tricked so many times, coaxed him to tell her what made him so strong. Thrice he deceived her, and thrice he escaped by his mighty muscles. He burst the green withs which bound him as a string of tow breaks when the fire touches it. The new ropes proved as useless. When Delilah wove his long hair in with the warp of the cloth she was making, he walked off with cloth, loom, and all. At last, worn out by her teasing, he told her that his strength lay in his hair; and, when he was asleep, she cut off the seven long locks, and made him as weak as common men. Then the Philistines crept out of their hiding-places, put out his eyes, and made him grind corn in prison.

Revenge.— But they had forgotten that his hair would grow again, and that with it his strength would come back. Soon his chance for vengeance came. The Philistines worshipped a god named Dagon, which had the body of a fish with the head and hands of a man. One day, when they were gathered in their temple, they called for the poor giant to be brought out and to make sport for them, either by tricks of strength or by his jokes, of which we have seen some specimens. He was led out, felt of the pillars that held up the roof crowded with people, and, with a prayer for help, grasped them in his arms, pulled them together, and died in the wreck with the mass of his enemies.

II. The Lesson.

A sad failure was Samson's life,— so much strength and so little good done with it. There is not a deed of his told which was anything more than a mere joke or than personal vengeance.

References.— For the interpretation of this story as a sun-myth, see "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xx. See also Geikie, vol. iii. 1-15; Stanley, i. 400-412.

LESSON XXIV.

RUTH.

(The Book of Ruth.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The Lord blesseth the habitation of the righteous."—PROV. iii. 33.

I. THE BOOK.

When the Book of Ruth was written is not known, nor is it known who wrote it. But it is one of the most beautiful stories that anybody ever wrote. It is very pleasant to come to it out of the wars and bloody deeds of the Book of Judges. It is like getting into a sunny and quiet spot out of the wind and the rain. In fact, the story it tells is a side-story, a little by-path quite apart from the main road of history. But it runs into the main road; for Ruth is the great-grandmother of the mighty king David, of whom the Israelites were never tired of telling.

II. THE STORY.

The Return of the Exiles.—Once upon a time in the days of the Judges, when there was a famine in the land of Israel, a certain man went across the river of Jordan, and settled in the land of Moab. There he died, and left his wife Naomi (the Lovable) with two sons, Mahlon (the Sickly) and Chilion (the Pining One). They married women of Moab, but died, leaving the three widows together. But Naomi had heard that the famine in Israel was over, and she determined to go back home. Her two daughters-in-law started with her, but she told them they had better go back and live in their own land. Orpah obeyed, but Ruth (the Friend) insisted on staying with her mother-in-law, to live and to die with her. "Thy people," she said, "shall be my people, and thy God my God." For in those days every one believed that in changing his nation he changed his God, as he did his king.

The Strange Coincidence.—The two women came to Bethlehem. They were very poor, and Ruth started out to get her bread by gleaning; that is, by going after the reapers and picking up the ears of grain which they overlooked or happened to let fall. It was a law in Israel or an old custom not to be too particular in gathering up the grain, but to let the poor have what they could find (Lev. xix. 9). Now it happened that the field in which she chanced to glean belonged to a man who was a kinsman of Naomi. His name was Boaz (the Active). He was a man no longer young, and he was considered rich. Ruth was a stranger in the land, and Boaz soon noticed her. Something about her attracted him very much. He spoke to her kindly, urged her to glean in his field and not to go elsewhere, told his young men to let some of the ears fall purposely for her, and invited her to share with him and them their frugal luncheon of parched ears of grain and cool water and vinegar. When she got home at night, Naomi noticed the unusual amount of grain which she had gleaned, and asked

her where she had got it. When Ruth told her that it was in the field of Boaz, her mother-in-law cried out in rapture, "Why, blessed be God, that is our own relative!" and, when Ruth went on to tell how specially kind Boaz had been in keeping her in his own field, Naomi saw how matters stood, and said quietly, "I think you had better keep in his field, my daughter."

Naomi's Plan.— It was the law in Israel, when a man dies leaving a widow and no children, that his brother or nearest relative should marry her. Since Boaz was, if not the nearest, at least a very near kinsman, Naomi determined that Ruth should appeal to him. Ruth, therefore, dressed herself in her best, and went to the threshing-floor of Boaz. When he had lain down at the end of his grain heap to watch it for the night, and had fallen asleep, Ruth went, as was the custom in such cases, and lay at his feet. When he found her there, he promised readily to do his duty as the kinsman of her husband, provided that one still nearer of kin refused to do his part.

The Marriage Contract.— The fulfilment of his promise makes one of the most picturesque scenes in the whole Bible. Boaz goes to the gate of Bethlehem, where men meet in those days for business, under the roof of the gateway, and waited there for the kinsman to pass by. When at last he came, Boaz made him sit down by him, and called also the other men as witnesses. In the presence of these the kinsman declared himself unwilling to marry Ruth, perhaps because she was a foreigner. He therefore drew off his shoe, which in the East is a symbol of possession, and gave it to Boaz. So Boaz married young Ruth, and the two lived very happily together. Their son was named Obed; his son was Jesse; and Jesse's son was the famous David, who became king of Israel and founded Jerusalem.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Family trees, their use and abuse. What difference does it make to you who your ancestors were? What do you think of titled nobility? Do you know Burns's poem,

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
A man's a man for a' that"?

2. Why did Ruth say to Naomi, "Thy God shall be my God"? Is not the Spaniard's or the Russian's God yours? If you go to China, do you go away from God?

3. Read iv. 7. How do men transfer property in these days? Why do they so?

4. Recall what you know of David.

References.—"Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xxi.; Geikie, vol. ii. pp. 21–29; Thompson's "Land and Book," vol. ii. p. 509; Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Ruth; Stanley," Lect. XIII., p. 336.

LESSON XXV.

SAMUEL.

(1 Samuel i. 1-3, 20-28; ii. 1-19, 26-36; iii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth."—1. SAM. iii. 9.

I. THE CONNECTION.

The period of the "Judges," or patriot chiefs, is not yet past. The Israelites are still scattered and disorganized, and therefore are still oppressed by the Philistines and others of the native tribes around them. But they are drawing closer together, and beginning to feel like a nation. Samuel is to be the last of the "Judges." He is a very strong, though a stern and almost savage, man; but under his rule Israel grows united enough to feel the need of a more stable government, which it now seeks in the form of a king.

II. THE STORY.

The Religious Parents.— There lived in Mount Ephraim a man by the name of Elkanah. He was a very religious man; and every year, as was the custom of good persons, he went up to the great sanctuary of Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices. The sanctuary was then in charge of the high priest Eli, a good but weak man, whose sons did what they liked, and were very bad men, as were also most of the priests. Elkanah dearly loved his wife Hannah, who had also a very religious spirit, and who prayed devoutly that God would give her a boy-baby; for, said she, "I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life." After many years a boy was born, and great was the rejoicing of father and mother. Hannah called him "Samuel," or "Heard of God," because in him her prayer had been answered.

Lent to the Lord.— Hannah kept her word. When the boy was old enough to live without her, she brought him up to Shiloh, and showed him to Eli, the high priest, and gave presents for the altar with him. "For this child I prayed," she said to Eli, "and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore, also, I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." Then she sang a beautiful hymn, which you will find at the beginning of chapter ii., and must read in the revised version, if you have it, because there it is arranged as poetry, as it should be. It is a hymn of confidence in Jehovah and in his triumph at last over the enemies of his people, for you must remember that Israel lived in constant warfare with the Philistines. What Hannah meant by lending him to the Lord was that he should be devoted to the special service of the Lord in the sanctuary. He was to be a Nazarite; that is, a devotee, and, as the custom was, should never have his hair cut, and should never drink any wine or strong drink or touch a dead body, however dear to him.

The Religious Boy.— No wonder that, with such parents, Samuel was a very religious boy. He remained all through his boyhood under the charge of Eli, doing such services about the sanctuary as a boy could do. He wore what was called a linen ephod; that is, a garment usually worn by the priests, though of less fine linen than they had. It was hard for his mother to have him live apart from her; but she came up every year as before, and whenever she came she brought him a little coat to wear over the ephod, when he needed it. Eli grew very proud of him, and gave his blessing to Elkanah and his wife for such a lovable boy.

The Corrupt Priests.— The example which the priests set the boy was a very bad one. They were dishonest and wicked in many ways. They stole the meat that was sent in for sacrifice, and were untrue to their office as representatives of the people before the Lord. Eli ought to have controlled them or put them out, but his own sons were among them; and he was not strong enough in character to do his duty on all alike. Some boys would have been spoiled by such examples before them every day. But Samuel was not. In fact, he was rather disgusted, and made better.

The Child's Vision.— Samuel was a remarkable child, and he became a remarkable man. He had a strange power, much revered in those days, of seeing visions all through his life. The first one came when he was yet a child. One night he lay down as usual to sleep in the sanctuary. The light in the seven-branched candlestick was still burning; for it was solemnly lighted every night, and extinguished every morning before daybreak. Samuel heard a voice calling to him. "Here I am," he cried, and ran to see what Eli wished of him; for Eli also slept in the sanctuary. But Eli answered that he had not called him, and told him to lie down again. But no sooner had the boy lain down again than the voice came again. Surely, he could not have mistaken again, he thought, and ran once more to Eli. "Thou *didst* call me," he said. But again Eli denied it, and sent him back. But, when Samuel came a third time, Eli felt sure that it was the Lord who had spoken to him; and he told the boy to say, when the voice came again, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." This he did, and the voice told him of disasters that were to come to Eli and his sons for their weakness and wickedness. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli what the vision was; but Eli insisted, and the boy told him. From that time on Samuel's fame as a prophet was established.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. What is it to be religious? Were not Eli and his sons as much in the house of God as Samuel? Were they as religious?
2. The advantage of good parents. Do good children ever come of bad parents or bad children of good parents? What can good parents do for their children? What should children do in return?
3. Do you know anything about bad priests? When was the Reformation? What was reformed?
4. How can a child now lend himself to the Lord?

References.— A beautiful lecture by Stanley, No. XVIII. See also XVII. in preparation for this lesson; "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xxii.; Geikie, vol. iii., ch. ii. and iii.

LESSON XXVI.

THE ANOINTING OF SAUL.

(1 Sam. viii., ix., x., xi., xiv., 20-45.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."—1 SAM. xvi. 7.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Samuel, whom we last saw as a child in the sanctuary, is now an old man. Eli is dead. Samuel has become the prophet of the Lord. The close relation which God was thought to have had with Moses seemed to have been restored with Samuel, after the long chaos of the time of the "Judges." God was considered as speaking through the mind and mouth of Samuel as the Roman Catholics believe that he speaks through the pope. Samuel had also been a warrior. The Philistines had been defeated, and Israel began to feel strong and hopeful.

II. THE STORY.

The Demand for a King.— But Samuel was now old; and his two sons, whom he made judges, were not like him, but took bribes, and did not do justice. The chief men of Israel saw that the rights of the people were in danger, and they resolved to move for a stronger and safer form of government. So they came to Samuel, and asked him to get them a king.

Samuel's Reluctance.— But Samuel was not willing to do this. He had two objections. First, he knew that kings often turned to tyrants. They would take away the property of their people, and turn their children into servants or slaves. But there was a reason which is not so easy for us to understand, but which was Samuel's chief objection. Now, God was the king of Israel. No one saw Him, it is true; but He ruled by His deputy, Samuel. When He wished anything done or prevented, He spoke to Samuel as an earthly king would to his prime minister; and he told the people. But to set up a man for king was to put a slight upon God, and to take human wisdom for divine. So Samuel reasoned, and he was at first violently opposed to the plan. But the people insisted, and he gave way. In fact, since there must be a king, he set himself to get the best one possible.

The Choice Young Man.— Samuel knew that the new king must be a man of physical power and fine appearance. One day he saw just the man he wished. His name was Saul. He belonged to the smallest of all the tribes, Benjamin; but perhaps that was an advantage, because he would arouse less jealousy in the stronger tribes. But he was by head and shoulders taller than anybody else, and very handsome. His father was a wealthy man, as wealth was in those days, in flocks and herds. One day it was found that some asses were missing, and Saul was sent with one of the servants to find them. They travelled long and

far, but in vain, and Saul was for giving up the search; but the servant proposed that they should first consult "a man of God" of whom he had heard, and who was said to know everything. So they went up the hill toward the city where Samuel lived. Some girls whom they met told them that he was sure to be there, for some great sacrifice was to be celebrated. Surely enough, as they reached the city, they met Samuel coming out to go to "the high place," where the altar was. The moment he looked upon Saul he was convinced that he was the man to be king. Saul, not knowing Samuel by sight, asked him where he could find the seer. Samuel revealed himself, and invited the young man to dine with him.

The Anointing.— When they had dined, and Saul and his servant were setting out for home, Samuel asked Saul to send his servant on ahead, and remain with him. Saul did so; and then, to his great astonishment, the prophet poured upon his head a vial of sacred oil, and pronounced him king.

According to another story, as some think, or, as others think, a continuation of this, Samuel made a public proclamation of his choice. He called all the people together, and, after reproaching them with rejecting the God who had brought them out of Egypt, he caused the tribes to pass in procession before him. From them he chose the tribe of Benjamin, from this tribe the family of Matri, and from this family Saul. But Saul was bashful, and ran and hid himself. But he was found, and brought out. When the people saw him standing there, so tall and handsome, they admired him, and shouted, "God save the King!" So at last Israel had its king.

Saul's Reign.— Saul had a very warlike and brave reign, with many incidents in it which you had better read for yourself. He had a son Jonathan, whose friendship with young David is famous in history. In chapter xiv. we have a fine story, which shows how brave Jonathan was, and how popular in Israel. The Philistines had become powerful again, and had even forbidden the Israelites to bear arms. In fact, there was not even a smith to sharpen common tools. But Jonathan and his armor-bearer scaled the steep sides of a Philistine stronghold, and attacked the enemy with such vigor that they thought that an army was behind them, fell into a panic, and fled. Saul set out with his army in pursuit, giving orders that no one should taste food till the pursuit was over, on pain of death. Jonathan, being ahead, knew nothing of this, and tasted some wild honey. For this his stern father doomed him to death; but the people protested, and saved him.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. How does God speak to men? What is meant by the infallibility of the pope?
2. What is the use of a king? Why is a republic better? What are the dangers of a monarchy? of a republic? What sort of a man should a king be?
3. Is a bad promise better broken than kept?
4. Tell what you know of Saul.

References.— Geikie, vol. iii. ch. iv.; "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xxiv., xxv., xxvi.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXI.

LESSON XXVII.

DAVID: HIS YOUTH.

(1 Sam. xvi., xvii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts."—1 SAM. xvii. 45.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Saul displeased Samuel because he had spared the king of the Amalekites and his flocks and herds, contrary to what Samuel had commanded in the name of the Lord, and to what he considered safe. The dreadful custom in those days was to disable the enemy that was conquered, sometimes by slavery, sometimes by massacre. The policy of the Israelites, from the days of Joshua to those of Samuel, had been to exterminate the native tribes of Canaan, that they might not be any longer dangerous or draw away the Israelites into their corrupt idolatries. Saul had not done this, but had kept Agag alive and saved the best of his cattle. Therefore, Samuel rejected him in the name of the Lord, and set about appointing another king. Meantime he slew Agag with his own hand.

II. THE STORY.

Samuel's Second Choice.— As Samuel thought over his delicate and dangerous duty, he recollected a young man, the son of Jesse of Bethlehem. To that town he went. The elders met him with trembling, for they knew how stern he was; and they feared lest he had come to punish them for some offence. But he assured them that he came peaceably and on business of the Lord. So, when they had sanctified themselves,—that is, had bathed and put on clean clothing, as we do for church, in the Lord's honor,—he asked for Jesse and his family. When the eldest, Eliab, came, Samuel was sorely tempted to take him; for he was tall and handsome, as Saul had been. But, then, Saul had not turned out well; and he resolved to look deeper than countenance and stature this time. Seven of the sons passed before him, but not the one he sought. But when the youngest, David, was brought in, at once he fixed upon him. David was young, auburn-haired, with beautiful eyes and a fine face; and the old prophet's heart warmed to him. He took the horn of oil which he had brought for the purpose, and anointed him king before them all.

Music hath Charms.— Saul knew nothing of this, however, and came to know David in a strange way. Saul was subject to fits of melancholy, with occasional outbursts of violence. When one of these was upon him, his servants proposed that he try music to cheer him. He consented; and they brought David to him, perhaps having him in mind all the time. And whenever the "evil spirit," as they called his mental trouble, came upon him, David charmed it away with his harp. Saul came to love him greatly and made him his armor-bearer.

Goliath.— Soon the Israelites and the Philistines met for battle. On two hills facing each other the two armies stood. Out from the army of the Philistines strode a huge fellow, Goliath by name, from a city called Gath. He was about nine feet tall, says the story. He had a helmet of copper, and a coat of mail that weighed over three hundred pounds. His spear-head alone weighed nearly twenty pounds. This giant made an insolent proposal to the Israelites, that they should send out a man to fight with him, and let this duel decide the battle for both armies. But no one, not even the mighty Saul, dared to take up his challenge. Day after day it was uttered, and day after day all feared to accept it.

David and his Sling.— David had been sent by his father to carry provisions to his brothers in the army. When he arrived, he heard of Goliath's challenge, and of the rich rewards that the king had promised to the man who would kill the giant. Eliab, David's eldest brother, was very angry that David, whom he considered a mere boy, should have anything to say about the matter. But David said only, "Can't I even ask about it?" and went quietly to Saul, and offered himself as the champion of Israel. Saul was shocked at the idea, and would not hear of it; but David told him of how he had killed a lion, and added that God would as surely deliver him from the giant. So Saul consented, but put his own armor on him. But, when the young man tried to move, he found that he was only encumbered with the large man's helmet and coat of mail. So he threw them aside, and took only his staff and sling and a few smooth stones from the brook-bed.

The Duel.— When the giant saw this stripling coming out to meet him thus armed, or rather unarmed, he felt insulted. But David answered his boasts with a simple expression of his reliance on God. The Philistine was enraged, and rushed toward him. David also ran toward him; and when he was near enough, though out of reach of Goliath's spear, he slung a stone with so true an aim that it struck the giant in the forehead, and killed him. Then David cut off his head with his own sword, and bore it back in triumph to his army. Curiously enough, the Philistines had made their enemies skilful with the sling; for they had taken away their arms, and forced them back upon natural weapons.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Was Samuel or Saul right about sparing Agag? Is mercy sometimes treason to the right?
2. Do you know of any cases in which music has soothed mad people?
3. Is it not better to rely upon ourselves than to imitate others, as David refused to wear Saul's armor?

References.— Geikie, vol. iii. ch vi.; "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xxviii.; Stanley, vol. ii ; Bible Dictionary, art. "David." On giants see Bible Dictionary and Encyclopædia Britannica or Chambers's Cyclopædia under this word.

LESSON XXVIII.

DAVID, AND SAUL'S HATRED OF HIM.

(1 Samuel xviii. 1-21, 30, xix., xx., xxiv.)

LESSON TEXT.—"I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you."—MATT. v. 44. [R. V.]

I. THE STORY.

The Friendship of Jonathan and David.—Jonathan was the son of Saul. How severe his father could be with him we learned in one of our recent lessons, where Saul would have killed him for disobeying orders in time of battle, but that he was saved by the people. When Jonathan saw David kill Goliath and heard him speak so modestly after it, he felt himself very strongly drawn to him. So began one of the famous friendships in history. It ranks with that of Damon and Pythias, or Orestes and Pylades in Greek history.

The Jealousy of Saul.—David had now become a popular hero. As he went through the land, he had a sort of triumphal march. The women came out of the cities to greet King Saul with songs and dances, playing upon tambourines and triangles. But with Saul's name they joined David's. "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Saul, already conscious that he was declining in favor with the people, felt very sore over this greater praise of David. The next thing that would happen would be his aiming at the throne. From that time Saul watched David closely.

Saul's Plot.—His jealousy went so far that one day, when one of his melancholy and savage moods was upon him, he threatened to pin David to the wall with the royal spear which, in place of a sceptre, he usually held. David escaped twice from this danger; but Saul's hatred followed him, and increased as he saw how he grew in favor with the people. At last he hit upon a plan to get rid of him forever. He found that Michal had fallen in love with young David, as her brother Jonathan had. It occurred to Saul that, if he promised Michal to David on condition that he should show his bravery once more against the Philistines, the young hero might get slain in battle, and that would be the end of him. But, as we read in v. 30, he showed himself more valiant than all of Saul's men; and he came back from the war more "set by" than ever.

David Flees.—Then Saul could no longer keep his hatred of David to himself. He openly ordered his followers, and even Jonathan, to kill David. But Jonathan praised David, reminded his father how the young man had saved the nation by killing Goliath, and prevailed on him at last to promise not to kill David. So David came back to the court as before. But war broke out with the Philistines again, and again David showed himself a hero. This was too much for the king's temper. At last, when David was playing the harp before him, Saul again tried to smite

him; but David escaped, and fled to his house. His wife Michal, however, was afraid to have him stay there, so she let him down through a window, and put an image in his bed. When David was safely away, she let the messengers of her father come in; and they found that what they supposed was David, safe in their hands, was only a wooden figure. Parties of messengers pursued him, but he was with a band of prophets, who were singing praise to God so mightily that the messengers, when they came up, had to join in and sing, too; and even Saul, when he followed to see what had become of them, was carried away with the same enthusiasm, and, his insanity coming upon him again, fell upon the ground in a trance.

Jonathan saves David.— But Saul's hatred was not at an end, and David fled still farther. Jonathan, having found that Saul still meant to kill him, told him by an ingenious device, which is described in chapter xx., to escape for his life. Then they parted with great grief. Jonathan went back to the city, and David went into exile.

David returns Good for Evil.—After many adventures, Saul thought he had David in his hands. He took a large force of men, and went to capture him in the wilderness of En-gedi. There he found a large cave into which he entered. But, as it happened, David and some of his friends were in the same cave, hidden in the darkness of the sides. David, in mere bravado, stole up behind Saul, and cut off a piece of his robe. But immediately he was sorry for it. He had no enmity against him; and, besides, Saul was the Lord's representative, and it was a sin against the Lord himself to insult him. So he ran after him, and called out to him. When Saul turned around, he showed him the piece which he had cut off. Then Saul was touched to the heart, and put away his anger. David, on his side, promised that he would not destroy his family, so they were reconciled.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. *Friendship.*— Of what use are friendships? Have you any? What is the best test of friendship? What great friendships are celebrated in history?
2. Was Jonathan right in betraying his father's plans to David?
3. What do you think of David's sparing Saul's life? Is revenge ever right? What would be the consequence if there were no hatred in the world?

References.— Geikie, vol. iii. pp. 163–207; "Bible for Young People," vol. ii. ch. xxviii., xxix.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXI.; Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Saul," "David," "Jonathan," "En-gedi."

LESSON XXIX.

DAVID, THE KING.

(1 Samuel xxxi ; 2 Samuel i., v. 1–12, 17–25, vi. 1–19, vii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even forever."—PSALM CXXV. 2.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Death of Saul.—At last the stormy life of King Saul came to an end. He fought his last battle with his old enemies, the Philistines, near Mount Gilboa. The Israelites fell in heaps before their enemies, Jonathan and two brothers were slain, and Saul himself was wounded by an arrow. Seeing that the battle was lost, and that he would be captured, he resolved to die rather than be led home by the enemy in triumph. He asked his armour-bearer to kill him, but he would not; and Saul then fell upon his own sword, and died. Then the army of Israel, seeing their king dead, broke and fled; and their cities fell into the hands of the Philistines. On the morrow, when the Philistines went over the field of battle to strip the slain, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons. After the barbarous custom of the times, they cut off Saul's head, fastened his body to the wall of one of their cities, and hung up his armour in the temple of their goddess, Ashtaroth. So died the first king of Israel. He was not a great man. He had great powers, but uncontrolled. He was the plaything of his passions, a rough, uncultivated, untrained man, but not without generosity or heroism.

David's Lament.—When David was told of the battle of Gilboa and the death of Saul and Jonathan, he could not believe it. But the runner who brought the news, an Amalekite, showed Saul's crown and armlet which he had brought, as proofs. He claimed to have killed Saul at his request, thinking perhaps to gain David's favour by the story. But David, though he had been freed from persecution by Saul's death, might now come back from exile, and was to be king in his stead, could think now only of Saul's kindness to him in earlier days, and of Jonathan's friendship. Suddenly his sorrow turned to anger. A foreigner had dared to lift his hand upon the Lord's representative! He commanded one of his men to kill the Amalekite who had borne witness himself to his killing the king. Then he lamented the king and his son in beautiful words, which you must read at the close of the first chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, beginning at v. 19.

II. THE STORY.

David becomes King.—So David became king of Israel, and a very famous one he was. One of his first acts was to found a city even more famous, the city of Jerusalem. It was a place situated on the top of two rocky and precipitous hills, and had remained in the possession of a tribe called the Jebusites, who were perhaps a remnant of the Canaanites. David knew it well,

and it was here that he left the head of Goliath after the famous fight. But, when he undertook to capture the town, the inhabitants mocked at him. "The lame and the blind could hold it against you," they said. But he did take it, and made it the capital of the nation.

Bringing up the Ark.— The first thing to be done for the new city was to bring up the ark, or chest, in which God was supposed especially to dwell. It contained the two tablets of stone on which it was believed that God's own hand had written the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna brought from the desert where it had fallen, and the famous rod of Aaron. We can imagine with what reverence David and his people regarded so sacred a thing. A new cart was provided, and the solemn procession began. David and his court went before it, playing on musical instruments. All was going well, when the oxen who were drawing the cart stumbled, or the cart canted, or for some other reason the ark seemed likely to fall, when one of the drivers, Uzzah by name, put out his hand to steady it. Instantly he fell dead. David, in awe, would not allow the ark to be carried any further then; but three months later it was taken safely up to Jerusalem into the tabernacle, or tent, which had been provided for it. David was very glad, and danced (for dancing of a certain kind was then a religious exercise, as it is still among the Shakers) "before the Lord" with all his might. His wife Michal, who could not understand such religion, laughed scornfully at him, at which he was very angry.

David's Plan for a Temple.— But it did not seem right to David that he should live in a house of cedar, while the ark of God should be left in a tent, so he proposed to Nathan, the prophet, to build a temple more worthy of the presence of the Almighty. Nathan at first approved of the plan; but, on further consideration, perhaps because David had been so warlike a man, perhaps because he thought that the time had not come for such an enterprise, he changed his mind, and, though he prophesied glory to come upon his descendants, dissuaded him from his purpose.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. *Review Saul's Career.*— What do you think of him?
2. *The Lament.*— Why do we naturally dwell on the good points of the dead? Why should we not speak ill of them? Do we idealize them, or do we only understand them better?
3. *The Ark.*— Does it seem strange to you that God should be thought of as dwelling in a chest? Does not the Catholic think of the body and blood of God being on the altar? Does it not seem to you sometimes as if God were in the church more than elsewhere?
4. Read Psalm xxiv. It is supposed to refer to the bringing up of the ark.

IV. References.

Geikie, vol. iii., ch. viii., ix.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii., ch. i., ii.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lecture XXIII.; Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Ark."

LESSON XXX.

DAVID AND ABSALOM.

(2 Samuel xiii. 22-39, xiv., xv., xviii.)

Lesson Text.— "A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." — Prov. x. 1.

I. The Connection.

David's reign had been a very successful one. He had gained victories over the Philistines, the old enemies of Israel, and over the Syrians, with whom he came in conflict as he extended his kingdom toward the north. The nation had made alliances with neighboring kingdoms, and was growing rich and powerful,— a great change from the mob of slaves that broke away from Egypt. But David, like most Oriental sovereigns, had one weak side to his life,— the dissensions and discord of his family. He had several wives, and the various sets of children quarrelled with each other.

II. The Story.

Absalom.— Absalom was the third son of David. His mother was the daughter of a Syrian prince. This royal blood from both parents blossomed in wonderful beauty in the boy. He was noted especially for his marvellous hair, which was cut every year (for men in those days let their hair grow long), and weighed over nine pounds. Like many other handsome boys, he was spoiled by flattery and affection, and grew up self-willed and passionate.

The Murder of Amnon.— Absalom had a sister Tamar, who was also very beautiful. Amnon, the eldest son of David and her half-brother, had insulted her. She ran to her brother's house, and told him. He advised her to say nothing about it, but meantime plotted revenge. He invited Amnon to his sheep-shearing, and then had him killed by his servants. He himself fled to his grandfather Talmai, king of Geshur. But the heart of David yearned after his handsome son, and quite forgot Amnon, because he was dead.

David forgives Absalom.— Joab, who was the king's chief warrior, saw that David really wished Absalom back, and laid a little plot to induce the king to recall his son. He got a woman to dress herself as a mourner, and pretend that one of her sons had killed the other, and was in danger of his life for it. David promised that he should not be harmed. Then the woman turned upon him, and reminded him that Absalom was in the same predicament, and that, if her son should be forgiven, so should David's son. David saw the force of her argument, though he perceived Joab's hand in the matter, and sent Joab to fetch Absalom back to Jerusalem. He refused, however, to see his face; and Absalom lived two years in his own house without meeting his father. Absalom could not stand this, however, and sent for

Joab. When he refused to come, the wilful fellow set Joab's standing barley afire, which soon brought him; and through him David was led, perhaps not unwillingly, to see his favorite son again.

Absalom's Treachery.— But the spoiled son was ungrateful. He found himself so great a favorite with everybody that he resolved to set his father aside, and to make himself king. He succeeded so far that David felt obliged to flee from Jerusalem across the Jordan, with such of his people as remained faithful; and Absalom came to reign in his stead. He even consented to the plan of his prime minister, Ahithophel, to send a large force of armed men to overtake and kill his father. He was dissuaded by Hushai, who was secretly working for David.

The Death of Absalom.— At last there had to be a battle between the forces of David and of his son Absalom. David was for going out himself to the battlefield; but his people would not allow it, because, if he were slain, the whole cause would be lost. So he stood at the gate of the city, and saw his troops march out, saying to Joab as he passed, "Deal gently with Absalom, for my sake." Joab made no answer: he had his own idea of what ought to be done to such a son. The army of Absalom was badly beaten. They tried to escape; but the woods were thick, and kept them back, so that they were easily overtaken. Absalom fled with the rest, on a mule; for there were few or no horses in Israel. But that which had been his glory and pride, his hair, now became his destruction and shame; for, as the mule ran under the boughs of a great oak, his hair caught in the branches, and there he hung helpless, while his mule ran on. A soldier saw his plight, but dared not lift his hand upon the king's darling son. So he ran, and told Joab. *He* had no scruples, but took three javelins and thrust them into Absalom's heart as he hung there. Ten young men, who followed Joab, now took courage, and also smote the dying prince. Then the body was thrown into a pit, and covered with stones. So died the spoiled and wayward young man. Then all Israel, seized with terror at the thought of the king's sorrow and wrath, fled every one to his tent.

David's Grief.— Runners bore the news to the king, supposing that he would be glad to hear of the death of the rebel. But David was overcome with grief, and turned away. He cared not for his victory or the safety of the kingdom. He could think only of his handsome boy, and wish he could have died for him.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. *The Spoiled Child.*— Is it well for a child to have his own way? What are likely to be the consequences? Why is obedience good? Read Longfellow's "Chamber over the Gate."
2. *The Handsome Boy.*— Is there more danger in being handsome than in being plain? Why? What is the true beauty? "Handsome is that handsome does."
3. *Hushai* (xv. 32-37).— Did Hushai do right to pretend to be Absalom's friend and really to serve David?
4. *Joab.*— Was Joab justified in killing Absalom?

References.— Geikie, vol. iii. ch. xii.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXIV.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. v.; Smith's Bible Dictionary, art. "Absalom"; Encyclopædia Britannica, art. "David."

LESSON XXXI.

THE CROWNING OF SOLOMON.

(1 Kings i. 5–53, ii., iii. 1–15.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Give thy servant an understanding heart."—1 KINGS iii. 9.

I. THE BOOKS OF THE KINGS.

We begin to-day what is called the First Book of the Kings. After it comes the Second Book. These two books formed originally one, and the two Books of Samuel formed another one. Then the two were made into the present four, which were all called the Books of the Kings. Then, probably because the First Book of Kings did not tell of a king to begin with, but of Samuel, the first pair were called the two Books of Samuel, while the other two were called, as they are now, the two Books of the Kings. These tell the story of the successive kings, at first of the whole kingdom, then, when the secession came, of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, until each was conquered and the tribes all carried into captivity.

II. THE CONNECTION.

David's Character.—The glorious reign of King David at last drew near its end. He had made a strong nation out of Israel. He had shown very diverse qualities (see 2 Sam. xxi. 1–14 and xxiii. 13–17); but he was of a generous as well as a brave disposition, and his sins, which were open, and not mean or underhanded, he repented of as impulsively as he had done them. On the whole, therefore, David has been beloved by readers of the Bible.

Family Quarrels.— Oriental kings bring much trouble upon themselves and their kingdom by having several wives. Their sons quarrel over the succession to the throne, and often produce bloody civil wars. David's eldest living son set himself up as king even before he died; and several of David's chief supporters, as Joab, the chief of his captains, and Abiathar, the priest, went over to his side.

III. THE STORY.

The Coronation of Solomon.— Now David had promised his favorite wife Bathsheba that her son Solomon should be king after him. So when she told him of what Adonijah was doing, and reminded him that, if he became king, she and her son would probably be put to death, the old king called the people together, and publicly had Solomon anointed as his successor. Adonijah and his friends were having a grand feast over his prospects, when they heard the shouting of the people, "God save King Solomon!" Then Adonijah's friends abandoned him; and he himself ran for his life, and caught hold of the horns of the altar to claim refuge in the sacred place. Solomon respected the sanctity of the altar,

and promised that, if Adonijah would behave himself well, he would not harm him.

David's Death.— When the aged king felt that his end had come, he called Solomon, and gave him some last advice. First of all, he must be strong. David foresaw trouble to come, from family quarrels and from the very luxury which he had brought into Israel, and the next king would need to "show himself a man." Then he told him to worship the national God Jehovah, and to keep the laws which had come through Moses. Finally, he gave him commands concerning certain men. Joab, who had been a harsh and bloody man, he was to put to death. Perhaps, though he did not mention it, he had never forgiven him for killing Absalom. Those who had been kind to him in exile were to be kindly treated, and his promises to others were to be kept. Then, after forty years of reign, the great King David died.

Solomon's Revenges.— At once the young king proceeded to carry out his father's wishes, and perhaps his own. Adonijah, who had tried to steal the kingdom from him, was put to death. Joab, whom his father hated and who had favoured Adonijah, soon followed; and Abiathar, the priest, was banished for the same reasons. Shimei, who had cursed David as he went out to exile after Absalom's rebellion, broke the terms on which his life had been spared, and was promptly killed.

Solomon's Dream.—Yet the young king began his reign with very lofty purposes. There is a beautiful dream told of him, which shows how pure-minded he was before the power which his father had placed in his hands and the luxury which surrounded him had corrupted him. When he was in Gibeon, making a great sacrifice to the Lord, he heard the voice of Jehovah commanding him in his sleep to ask whatever he wished. Solomon began by recognizing the mercy and kindness which the Lord had shown to his father David, and most of all in giving him a son to succeed him. Then he humbly spoke of his own youth and ignorance, how little he knew of the affairs of state, and how unable he felt himself to manage so great a nation. He asked, therefore, for an understanding heart, that he might be a wise and good king. Then the Lord answered that the speech had greatly pleased him, and that he would grant him not only the wisdom he had asked for, but the things which he had not desired,— long life, riches, the life of his enemies. He promised Solomon that he should be the greatest king of Israel's line, none greater before or after him. Then Solomon awoke, and went back to Jerusalem, and celebrated the promise with a great sacrifice and a feast to all his servants.

IV. Topics and Questions.

1. Look through the four Books of Kings, and see what they cover. What are the chief events recorded in the two Books of Samuel?
2. Look back over David's reign. What had he done, and what sort of a man had he been?
3. What do you think of David's last words to Solomon? Ought we to forgive or to curse our enemies on our death-bed?
4. Is it common for young persons to start out with high ideals and resolutions? How often are they kept throughout life?

References.—Geikie, vol. iii., ch. xv., xvi., xvii.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii., ch. vi., vii.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXVI.; Bible Dictionary, art. "Solomon."

LESSON XXXII.

SOLOMON'S JUDGMENT.

(1 Kings iii. 16-28, iv. 29-34, x. 1-10.)

LESSON TEXT.—"The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, . . . full of mercy and good fruits."— James iii. 17.

I. THE STORY.

Solomon's First Case of Law.—Solomon had asked in his dream for an "understanding heart." He was soon to find the need of it. In many Oriental countries cases of justice are brought directly to the king instead of, as in England and Germany, to the courts. Sometimes there is no law to fit the case. In fact, the decision of the king often overrides all laws; and, if he is to win the favor and the respect of his subjects, he must be a very shrewd man. A case soon came before Solomon which called for great knowledge of human nature. Two mothers laid claim to a child. The king was asked to decide which was the real mother. There was no testimony but that of the two women, and this was contradictory. So the king resolved to see which loved the child with a real mother's love. He ordered a sword to be brought, and the child divided into halves, and half given to each of the women. At once the real mother felt that she would rather have the other woman have the child than see it killed, and she so asked the king. This was what he had expected, and he gave her the child. What was done to the other woman we are not told. The fame of Solomon for wisdom was at once made, and it is as the "wise Solomon" that his name best lives in our minds.

Solomon's Wisdom.— The reputation of Solomon for wisdom is shown by the books in the Old Testament which have been supposed to have been written by him. The Book of Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, besides some books in what is called the Apocrypha,— which you may find between the two Testaments in some old Bibles, and which Catholics receive as inspired, but the Protestants do not,— all have been ascribed to Solomon. Probably in his case, as in others, many books and sayings have been attributed to him which he did not write, though he may have led to their being written by the influence of his wisdom upon others, because no one else was known who, it was supposed, could have composed them. At the end of chapter iv. you will find his reputation summed up. He was wiser than all the wise men of the East or of Egypt, wiser than certain men, who are named, who were famous for their deep sayings. Three thousand proverbs were ascribed to him. There are about one thousand preserved in the Book of Proverbs, and a thousand and five songs, of which two are said by some to be Psalms lxxii. and cxxvii., and are certainly very beautiful. Then he seems to have been a close observer of nature, both of the great cedar-trees that were so famous in Lebanon and of the little vine that grows on

the wall. He was therefore a botanist, though probably in a very unscientific way. He spoke of beasts and birds, of reptiles and fishes. He is the first of the descendants of Abraham to care much about learning. Hitherto they had been obliged to think too much of merely getting a living.

Solomon's Fame.—From all over the world, says the story, men came to hear Solomon talk. One famous case of this we must notice. It is told in chapter x. 1–10. The queen of Sheba, which probably was a part of Arabia, heard of Solomon's wisdom, and came to talk with him. She brought beautiful and rich presents with her, such as a queen should bring to a king, gold, precious stones, and spices, which were much valued for incense and perfume. Having thus won his favour, she began conversation with him, telling him the questions she had come to ask him, and seeking his advice on various matters that perplexed her. Perhaps she had a good opinion of her own wisdom and the splendour of her own kingdom. But she found herself outdone in everything. Beside his wisdom she felt herself a child; and, in comparison with the magnificence of his palace and temple, and manner of living, she seemed poor. "I believed not the words until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold! the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." So with her blessing on him and those who were with him, and with more splendid presents, she went back to her own country, completely humbled. "There was no more spirit in her."

Solomon's Luxury and Fall.—There is not space to tell of the luxury with which Solomon lived, the splendour of the temple which he built, or the magnificence of his royal state. It is sad to see, however, how completely he lost that early ideal of which he dreamed, and how his people, spoiled by the luxury which his commerce and conquests brought in, declined in power, separated after his death into two kingdoms, and at last were carried away into captivity. This you must read for yourselves.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. What is the difference between the way of rendering justice among us and in Oriental countries? Which do you prefer, and why?
2. What is true wisdom? What is wisdom of the heart?
3. What is the effect of luxury upon a nation? Can a nation be "spoiled" as well as a child? Are we better than our fathers, who had to work harder?

III. References.

A fine lecture (XXVIII.) in Stanley's second volume. See also XXVI. for an account of Solomon's magnificence, and XXVII. for a description of the temple. Geikie, vol. iii. ch. xv., xvi., xvii.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. vii.

LESSON XXXIII.

ELIJAH FED BY RAVENS.

(1 Kings xi. 26-43; xii. 1-17; xvii.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."—MATT. vi. 33.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Rehoboam.—The long and prosperous but luxurious reign of Solomon is over. He has been succeeded by his son Rehoboam about the year 975 B.C. He was a full-grown man, about forty years old; but he seems to have had but little good sense. The wisdom which came to his father did not descend to him, and, in fact, does not seem to have lasted Solomon very long. Rehoboam, having been brought up in the midst of prosperity and in the royal court, where he knew nothing but obedience and homage, thought his power secure. He did not know that all this luxury and splendor at his father's court had caused enormous expense and heavy taxes upon the common people. He did not see that they were growing restless and angry under the burden.

The Haughty Answer.—When the representatives of the people came to him, on his accession to the throne, and asked to have their taxes lessened, he was very haughty and rough. The old men, who had been the counsellors of his father and who had seen how matters were tending, advised Rehoboam to be his people's true servant, and win their favor by seeking their good. But the young men, who thought they knew all about how to govern and felt secure in their power, advised him to give a proud and harsh reply. This he did, telling the people that he would make their burdens heavier instead of lighter.

The Secession.—The people were made angry by this rough answer; and ten of the twelve tribes seceded, and formed a separate kingdom under the ancient name of Israel, while the other two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, are known henceforth as the kingdom of Judah. The kingdom of Israel had Jeroboam for its first monarch. In order to widen the breach between the two kingdoms, he led Israel into shameful idolatry, while Judah remained true to the worship of the unseen Jehovah. But the throne of Israel, having no one of royal blood upon it, became the prey of bold men, one after another. At the time of which we are to speak (903 B.C.) Ahab was the king. He had married a Canaanitish woman named Jezebel, who was a woman of determined character, and seems to have had her husband completely under her control. She was an idolater, like all her race; and the religion of Jehovah was in danger of destruction.

II. THE STORY.

Elijah.—Now arose in the hour of Israel's need a mighty prophet. We have heard little of prophets since Samuel's time,

but from now on they become the religious leaders of Israel and Judah. Elijah was a stern, rough man from Gilead, the mountainous country on the east of Jordan. He was a tall, lean, sinewy man, with his long hair hanging down his back,— for he was a Nazarite, or ascetic, like Absalom,— and wearing only a long robe, girt with a leather belt. Through all his history he appears and disappears suddenly, perfectly fearless, denouncing the king to his face on the high road, and then vanishing into the wilderness before he can be caught.

The Threat to the King.— This striking figure appears before Ahab, and prophesies a great drought as a penalty for his idolatry. Then he flees, and hides in the deep ravine which the brook Cherith has worn in the rocky hills. There he lived, no one knew how; and the story arose that the ravens, or crows, brought him bread and meat. For a while he gets his water from the brook; but it soon dries up in the great drought, and he is left to thirst.

The Reward of Hospitality.— The prophet flees beyond the borders of Israel into the kingdom of Sidon. There he finds a widow gathering sticks, and begs her to give him a little water. This she starts to do, and he begs also a little bread. Then she tells him that she is just going to bake her last loaf of bread, since she has but a handful of meal left in the barrel and a little olive oil in an earthenware cup. But the prophet tells her to go on and make the bread, for God would see that she had plenty. And surely enough, so long as he stayed at her house, the meal and the oil were renewed, and there was no lack. But, when her only son fell sick and apparently died, she became afraid of Elijah. When, however, in answer to his prayer, the boy revived, she, though a foreigner, became a follower of the prophet of Jehovah.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Think what you know of Solomon's reign.
2. Are the sons of rich or high persons apt to be haughty?
3. Has a nation a right to rebel against unjust taxation?
4. What is a prophet?
5. Have you heard the oratorio of "Elijah"?
6. Does God feed good men now in miraculous ways?
7. Would it be well for God always to repay hospitality with abundance? Would it be true hospitality?

References.— Geikie, vol. iv. ch. i., ii., and iii.; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXX.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. ix., x., and xi.; Bible Dictionary, "Elijah"; Encyclopædia Britannica, "Elijah."

LESSON XXXIV.

ELIJAH AND THE PRIESTS OF BAAL.

(1 Kings xviii.)

LESSON TEXT. — "Let it be known this day that thou art God." — 1 KINGS xviii. 36.

I. THE STORY.

The Prophet and the Prime Minister. — After many days Elijah thought it was time to encounter Ahab again. On his way south he met Obadiah, who was the vizier of Ahab, and recently a worshipper of Jehovah. In fact, during Jezebel's persecution he had taken care of a hundred prophets, hiding and feeding them. Now, Ahab and Obadiah had set out by different routes to find water and pasturage for the royal horses and mules. Suddenly, as Obadiah was journeying, the gaunt figure of Elijah appeared before him, and told him to go and tell Ahab that he was there. But Obadiah shrank from such an errand. Ahab had sent in every direction to find Elijah, making the authorities swear that they did not know where he was. Now, if Obadiah should go and tell him that he had seen Elijah so near, the king would slay his minister in anger. Obadiah begged, for the sake of the service he had done for the prophets, that he might not be put in this danger. So Elijah promised to show himself to the king.

The Prophet and the King. — When Ahab saw Elijah, he charged him with troubling Israel. But Elijah retorted that it was Ahab who had brought trouble upon Israel by forsaking the worship of the God of Israel and following after strange gods. Then he asked the king to gather the prophets of Baal and of Ashera together at Mount Carmel, eight hundred and fifty in all, and to call together the people of Israel also. This was done; and Elijah proposed a strange contest between Baal and Ashera on the one side and Jehovah on the other, he being the only priest of Jehovah against the multitude of the other priests.

The Rival Gods. — There were two chief gods who were worshipped by Israel under the lead of Jezebel. One was Baal, a god of Tyre, a splendid city which had organized a magnificent but corrupt religion in his name. The other was a Syrian goddess named Ashera. Together they represented what we call nature, the power that makes the flowers and fruits and crops grow. There were such foul practices connected with this religion that Elijah and his followers hated it quite as much as good men as they hated it as priests or as lovers of the truth. Now he proposed a contest between these false gods and the true God, which should settle the question as to which was the more powerful. What really took place it is hard now to say; and we can only tell the story as we find it, — a very splendid and picturesque story.

The Struggle. — Mount Carmel was a ridge in the northern part of Israel running out as a promontory into the sea, where it ends very abruptly in a high bluff. Here Elijah looked down

upon the fickle people of Israel, and taunted them with their changefulness in religion. "How long will you limp first on one foot, and then on the other? Why don't you find out which is the true God, Baal or Jehovah, and follow him?" Then he proposes a way to find out which is the true God. The priests of Ashera seem not to have come, and Elijah has to deal only with those of Baal. He challenges them to a trial of power between the gods. He gives the prophets of Baal the first chance. They slay a bullock, and lay it on wood upon an altar, and call upon their god to send fire to consume it. But no fire comes, though they dance about the altar all the forenoon. Elijah taunts them. Let them call louder, perhaps Baal is asleep or is talking with some one, and does not hear. Then the frantic prophets dance the harder, and cut themselves till the blood runs, as is still done in Eastern lands. But evening comes, and no fire descends.

The Victory. — Then Elijah takes his turn. He rebuilds a broken altar of Jehovah, and puts the bullock for sacrifice upon it. Then, to make his victory the more astonishing, he has water poured upon the sacrifice and the wood under it three times, till everything is drenched. Then he calls upon Jehovah to show that he is the true and most powerful God by sending down fire from heaven. Then, says the story, flames descended and burned up not only bullock and wood, but the stones of which the altar was built and the very water in the trenches. Then all the people, who had stood looking on, fell upon their faces, and acknowledged that Jehovah was God. The prophets of Baal were slain. A great rain-storm ends the drought, and Ahab had hard work to get home through the freshet.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. Did Elijah cause the drought and rain or predict them? Do you know the story of Cortes and the eclipse?
2. What can you learn of Baal? Why is idolatry hurtful? Are the images in Catholic churches idols?
3. Did Israel do right to slay the prophets of Baal? What is toleration in religion?

References. — Encyclopædia Britannica, "Baal"; Geikie, vol. iv. pp. 72-80; Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXX.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. xii.

LESSON XXXV.

ELIJAH AND THE CHARIOT OF FIRE.

(1 Kings xix., xxii.; 2 Kings ii., ix. 17-37.)

LESSON TEXT.—"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."—1 KINGS xx. 11.

I. THE CONNECTION.

Ahab acted like one bewildered by the fall of Baal. He obeyed Elijah in all things, and went home at his command. But Jezebel was of sterner stuff. When Ahab told her what had happened on Carmel, she sent word to Elijah that the next day he would be as dead as the prophets of Baal whom he had slain. Elijah knew that she meant it, and ran for his life. Strange to say, in spite of the miracle which had been done for him, he fell into a fit of melancholy and discouragement, and begged to be allowed to die. He threw himself under one of the solitary bushes that star the desert, and fell asleep. Then an angel touched him, and awoke him; and he found a cake of bread and a crock of water by his side. After a second supply he felt refreshed, and went on his way southward till he came to Mount Horeb, near the place where the Law is said to have been given to Moses long before.

II. THE STORY.

A Lesson from the Lord.—On Mount Horeb there was a cave which Elijah knew of, for it is spoken of as "the cave"; and there he lodged. As throughout the whole story, God seems to keep near him. He asks the discouraged prophet what he is doing here, so far away from his duty in Israel. He answers that he has stood up for Jehovah, but it is of no use, the people have abandoned him, thrown down his altars, and only the prophet himself is left to bear witness to him, and even *his* life is sought. Then the Lord reads him a lesson out of nature. A tremendous tempest rushes along the mountain side, breaking off huge fragments of the red granite, and hurling them down into the ravines. But God was not in the wind, nor was he in the earthquake, or the fire which followed. But there came a gentle breeze that blew through the silence and the fresh sunshine with a delicate rustling that seemed to speak to the discouraged prophet's very heart. It told him that violence and persecution were not the best methods of establishing God's kingdom, though they must perhaps sometimes be used, but love and patience were far better, and in the end surer.

New Courage.—At the same time the prophet felt new calmness and strength come into him. He rapidly formed new plans,—he would go to Damascus, he would set Hazael to be king over Syria, and then he would anoint Jehu king of Israel in place of Ahab. Between these two he would make head against the tide of idolatry. And, as for sympathy in Israel, it seemed to him now as though there must be as many as seven thousand worshippers

of Jehovah left in Israel, though the court and the people so largely had gone over to Baal. He would make sure of a successor to lead them, in case he himself should be taken away. Elisha would make a good one. So, brave and patient once more, the prophet went back to his native land.

Ahab and Jezebel.—Evil came upon the wicked king and queen at last. Ahab induced Jehosaphat, king of Judah, to join with him in assaulting a city which belonged to the king of Syria. In the battle that followed a certain man shot an arrow without much aim into the army of Israel, and it struck Ahab between the joints of his armor. Of this wound he died. As for the idolatrous Jezebel, she met a worse death. Jehu slew the son of Ahab, and became king in his stead. As he came to Jezreel, where the widowed queen was living, she looked out of the window, and, determined as ever, reproached Jehu with the murder of his king. He ordered her to be thrown out, and her body was eaten by the dogs.

Elijah's Ascent.— As for Elijah, it was believed that he, like Romulus, was taken to heaven in a storm. Together with Elisha, he stood on the western bank of Jordan, and smote the river with his rolled up mantle. The water immediately parted, and the two prophets passed over dry shod. But as they passed along on the other side, talking together, a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire appeared; and in a whirlwind Elijah went up to heaven. But it was always believed that he would come back again some day. Malachi (iv. 5, 6) foretold his return as a herald of the Messiah; and, when John the Baptist came, many thought that he was Elijah (Matt. xi. 14). To this day at the Passover feast, wherever the Jews are, the youngest child opens the door, and all look toward it to see if the great prophet has come again at last.

III. Topics and Questions.

1. Was it right to kill the prophets of Baal because they held a wrong belief? Is persecution a good way to correct error and spread truth?
2. What did God mean to teach Elijah in the "still small voice"?
3. Elijah found that he was not alone in Israel. Do discouraged persons see things as they are? Is it wise to be ever discouraged?
4. Is heaven any more above us than beside or below us? How came people to believe this? Where, then, did Elijah go?

References.—See a fine sermon by Robertson, Second Series, No. VI., Geikie, vol. iv. ch. iii.; Stanley, vol. ii.; Lect. XXX.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. vii.; Encyclopædia Britannica, "Israel"; Bible Dictionary, "Elijah."

LESSON XXXVI.

ELISHA.

(1 Kings xix. 19–21; 2 Kings ii., iv., v., vi., xiii. 14–21.)

LESSON TEXT. — "Speaking the truth in love." — EPH. iv. 15.

I. THE STORY.

The Calling. — One of the plans which Elijah formed in the cave of Horeb was to make Elisha his successor. He went straight to him, and found him ploughing a field. He cast upon him the sheepskin mantle which he always wore, in token of adoption as his disciple (a custom still in use by Mohammedan and Brahmin priests). Elisha asked to be allowed to take leave of his parents, which Elijah grudgingly gave. He went back, sacrificed the oxen with which he was ploughing, using the plough and yoke as wood, and then came and followed Elijah.

The Mantle of Elijah. — When Elijah was taken up into heaven in the chariot of fire, Elisha stood and looked sadly after his master. But he saw lying near him the sheepskin robe which had been cast upon him when Elijah called him to be his disciple, and he wore it henceforth as his own. Along with this mantle it was believed that miraculous powers came to Elisha. Turning to the Jordan, he smote its waters with the rolled up mantle, as he had seen his master do; and again the waters divided to let him go through to the other side, where he lived.

Stories of Miracles. — There was a spring (2 Kings ii. 19) which had a very injurious effect upon the cattle who drank from it; but Elisha, by putting salt into it from a new earthen dish, made it healthful. This may have been, however, a natural process. The prophets, like Moses, were often learned in matters of this kind. Some young men mocked him, and called him a "bald-head"; *i.e.*, a leper. But, when he cursed them, two bears came out of the wood, and devoured them. The widow of a prophet (iv. 1) was in debt, and had not wherewith to pay. But Elisha made her pot of oil fill all the vessels she had or could borrow; and so not only was the debt paid, but enough received to support her and her children. The son of a rich woman (iv. 8) had a sunstroke, and died. But Elisha stretched himself upon him, and brought him back to life Elisha (vi. 38) was sitting at meat with some other prophets, when it was found that a poisonous plant had been cut up in the soup. But Elisha threw in meal, and prevented the poison from working. He fed (iv. 42) a hundred men with twenty loaves, and had some left. He makes an iron axe-head swim in the water into which it had fallen (vi. 4), and smites with blindness the army of the Syrians that had been sent against him (vi. 8).

The Cure of Naaman. — But the most famous story about Elisha was that of his curing the general of the king of Syria (iv.). He was a very able commander, and had delivered the

kingdom from the Assyrians. To his horror, he found that he had caught somewhere the terrible disease of leprosy, in which the fingers and toes rot off, the whole body turns white and swells disgustingly, and a lingering death is the end. No one could cure him. At last a little Hebrew girl, who had been brought to Damascus among the captives, told him of Elisha, who, she believed, could cure him. A messenger was sent to the king of Israel, bearing magnificent presents. The king was frightened at such a message, fearing some insult concealed in it, since he certainly could not cure any one of leprosy. But Elisha took the matter into his own hands, and sent for Naaman to come to him. When he came, Elisha would not go to meet him, great man though the general was, but sent word to him to go and wash seven times in the river Jordan.

At this the Syrian was extremely angry. He felt that he was being trifled with. Jordan was a muddy stream; while the Abana and the Pharpar, near Damascus, were very clear and transparent rivers. Why were not they good enough to wash in? But one of his servants argued with him, and he consented to obey. So he dipped seven times in Jordan, and "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child."

Then he believed in Jehovah; and, since the prophet would take no reward, he begged some of the earth of Jehovah's land, that he might worship Jehovah on his own soil. This was given him; and then he stipulated that he should be allowed to go with his master, the king of Syria, into the temple of Rimmon, and bow in form of worship with him there. Elisha gave an evasive answer, and the delighted general went back home.

Elisha's Death and Character.—When Elisha was about to die, the king of Israel wept over him with the same words as those which Elisha had spoken as he saw Elijah go to heaven. Elisha prophesied the future deliverance of the kingdom from Syria, and died. So great was the belief in him that it was said that his very bones had power to raise the dead. Elisha was a very different man from Elijah. He loved the cities rather than the wilderness, was gentle and politic rather than blunt and harsh. He was friendly with kings, which Elijah never was. He was of a tender heart, though conscientious and brave when occasion demanded. Times had changed, and Elisha was a better kind of a man for them than the stern Elijah would have been. The stories of his many miracles show how great was the reverence for him.

II. Topics and Questions.

1. Ought Elijah to have rebuked Elisha for wishing to take leave of his parents?
2. What is meant by the mantle of one falling on another?
3. What is a miracle, and how does the belief in miracles arise?
4. Why did Elisha command Naaman to bathe in Jordan? What is mind-cure?
5. Which do you like better, Elijah or Elisha?

References.—Stanley, vol. ii., Lect. XXXI.; Geikie, vol. iv. ch. v.; "Bible for Young People," vol. iii. ch. xiii.; Bible Dictionary, "Elisha."

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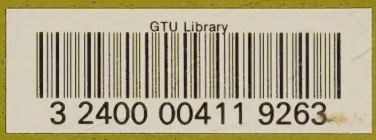

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